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Nairo Quintana, and Taylor Phinney are among pro
cycling's class of 1990, taking the sport by storm

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The image displays three digital devices showcasing the digital content of Velo magazine. The background is a large tablet showing the 2014 Awards Issue, featuring a cyclist in a red and black jersey with the text "2014 velo CYCLIST OF THE YEAR JENS VOIGT". The foreground on the left is a smartphone displaying the 4th Annual Personalities Issue, featuring a cyclist on a road bike. On the right is another tablet displaying the Buyer's Guide, featuring a yellow Trek Emonda SLR bicycle.

Tablet (Background):

- HOLIDAY GIFTS FOR EVERY CYCLIST
- 2015 UCI CHAMPION
- 2014 AWARDS ISSUE
- Our Cyclist of the Year revealed page 22
- 2014 **velo** CYCLIST OF THE YEAR
- JENS VOIGT
- A LOOK BACK AT AN EPIC
- VAN GARD

Smartphone (Left):

- STATIONARY TRAINING
- velo**
- 4th Annual Personalities Issue
- FEATURING ABIGAIL ANCELLARA
- SCHALIE SCHETTE
- LEG LEMOND
- SCHALIE SCHETTE
- WOMEN RACING

Tablet (Right):

- The hottest bikes
- BUYER'S GUIDE**
- EDITORS' PICKS FOR: Climbs, gran fondos, singletrack, and snow rides
- BIKE** of the year
- Trek's 690-gram Emonda SLR
- WIN IT! DETAILS ON PAGE 81
- THE BEST IN WOMEN'S GE

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MAGAZINE FOR SERIOUS CYCLISTS



MARCH 2015

velo

2015 SEASON PREVIEW



VELONOTES

HOUSE OF CARDS

11 As the ruble flounders, Russian-financed teams face a grim prospect. Their plight is nothing new, and epitomizes the fragile state of the cycling economy.

RETRO MODERN

18 The upturned brim of a cycling cap. It doesn't seem like much, but the look is symbolic of cycling's gaze over the shoulder to elements of its rich history. The peloton is looking backward for inspiration on a new trajectory.

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20 Now is the time that Greg Van Avermaet must strike. After several seasons of close encounters with glory, the Belgian is on the cusp of his most important season.

THE CLASS OF 1990

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OUT OF AFRICA

32 Dreams do come true. The revamped MTN-Qhubeka will become the first African-based team to ride the Tour de France.

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36 Andrew Talansky and Tejay van Garderen are similarly aged, with similar strengths, and similar goals. They say they don't have a rivalry; others say it's just a matter of time.

CLASSICS COUNTRY

44 The spring classics just might offer up the best racing of the year. We highlight the five things you can't miss in 2015, from Cancellara to Wiggins, Flanders to Sanremo.

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48 The grand tours — there's nothing like the stepwise unfurling of cycling's most dramatic narratives. We break down the most important stages of the three grandest races of the year.

CALCULATED COMPETITION

54 The speed is in the data. As science comes to the fore in cycling, novel ways of calculating how to make a bike go faster are making the sport lightning quick.

ON THE COVER: Michal Kwiatkowski
PHOTO: Tim de Waele

THIS PAGE: Ivan Basso, Peter Sagan,
and Alberto Contador
PHOTO: Cor Vos



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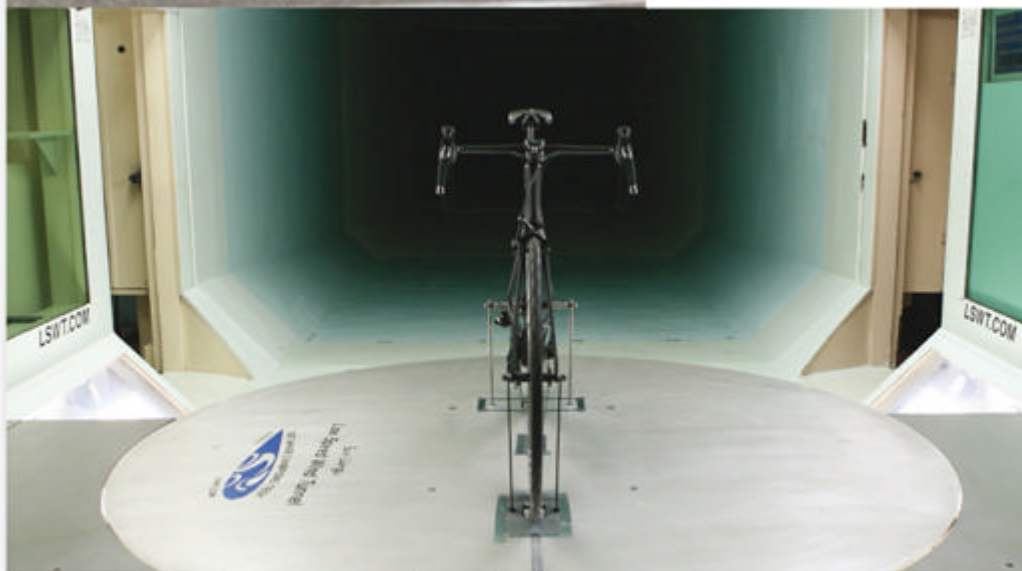
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OFF THE FRONT

AUSTIN POWERS

Jeremy Powers (Rapha-Focus) won a third national cyclocross championship in January in Austin, Texas, overcoming one of the deepest men's fields in recent memory, a heavy mud course, and a last-minute race postponement that rocked the January 7-11 event.

Controversy nearly overwhelmed the elite races, when pressure from the Austin Heritage Tree Foundation prompted the cancellation on Sunday morning by the Austin Parks and Recreation Department of the remaining national title races. USA Cycling scrambled to negotiate with Parks and Rec staff, but not before the races had to be postponed; the course was modified slightly to accommodate for the roots of historic trees in the city's Zilker Park, and the races were back on for Monday afternoon.

Powers and Jonathan Page (Fuji-Spy) quickly moved off the front of the elite men's race as Zach McDonald (Cyclocross Project 2015) chased alone. The defending champion's advantage over Page was quickly out to 10 seconds. Then, Page had an untimely puncture. "I flattened directly out of the pit," said Page. "That was the race."

The gap hovered between 15 and 20 seconds for the remainder of the race; still, given the treacherous conditions, any mistake by Powers would have left the door wide open for Page. Instead, Powers rode flawlessly to victory.

"I was definitely blown," Powers said. "I can't believe I actually won. I was looking at this and thinking it was going to be very hard to win. These are unique conditions and something I've always struggled with to win."

In the women's race, the indomitable Katie Compton (Trek Factory Racing) started slowly, but quickly rode away from the field. It has been a difficult season for the two-time World Cup champion, as she has struggled with allergy issues throughout the year.

"Honestly I just had to be a lot more conservative today," Compton said. "I wasn't feeling awesome, wasn't sure if I went out too hard if it would come back to get me. I knew I couldn't go too deep too soon."

Compton held off Kaitie Antonneau (Cannondale-Cyclocrossworld.com) for her unprecedented eleventh title.

PHOTO BY WIL MATTHEWS



A view of things to come

In the Editor's Note of the February issue of *Velo*, which focused on professional cycling at a crossroads, I wrote that change is constant, that it's relentless, and that as long as it's channeled properly, it's a positive thing.

And now, as we close our March issue, a 2015 WorldTour season preview, it's only fitting that I provide a view of things to come within the VeloNews editorial team, and explain how a few changes will, ultimately, be a good thing.

As of March 1, I'll be stepping down from my post as Editor in Chief to join Global Cycling Network (GCN) as its first North American contributor. I'll be a Presenter on The GCN Show, using skills developed scripting and hosting the VeloCenter news show in 2009 and 2010. It's not a decision I made lightly, and if pressed to provide a reason, I'd answer simply that, after 13 years working full-time with VeloNews, I'm ready for new opportunities and challenges.

What this is not, however, is a goodbye. I've been a part of the VeloNews brand for too long, and I enjoy the process of writing too much, to step away from either entirely. After March 1, I will continue on as Editor at Large, contributing to both *Velo* magazine and VeloNews.com. I won't be working in the office, but I will be attending weekly meetings, and I will continue to be active in editorial planning and direction. In fact, it's likely you'll be seeing my byline more than you have in recent years.

So, in 2015, I will continue to attend major races, domestic and abroad, reporting both on camera and in print. GCN and VeloNews have an established, mutually beneficial partnership, and this dual role is a perfect scenario for me. And while there will be a transition period for the VeloNews edit team, I'll be available to make it as seamless as possible, working closely with *Velo* Managing Editor Chris Case, VeloNews.com Editor Spencer Powell, and the new Editor in Chief.

My objective is that you, our reader, won't notice a thing. Whether online or in print, you'll still enjoy quality content from our reliable stable of contributors such as Andrew Hood, Lennard Zinn, Gregor Brown, Dan Seaton, Dan Wuori, Ryan Newill, Steve Maxwell, and Trevor Connor. We'll continue to provide firsthand insight from pro racers Phil Gaimon, Chad Haga, Carmen Small, and Julian Kyer. And there will be no change to our beautiful race photography from the lenses of Tim de Waele, Casey B. Gibson, and Jim Fryer and Iri Greco at BrakeThrough Media.

I have a few more names I hope to add to this list, which I expect to announce soon.

In addition to seeking a new Editor in Chief — someone with extensive print and digital media experience and a deep understanding of pro cycling — VeloNews has another staff opening.

I'm happy to announce that our current Technical Editor, Caley Fretz, is



transitioning away from gear, and toward race reporting. Caley is a fantastic writer, and I look forward to reading his big-picture view of the sport, as well as his inside look at what takes place in the pro peloton. To fill his shoes, we're looking for someone who is equally adept at wrenching, riding, and writing.

Both positions are based in Boulder, Colorado. If you think you're right for the job, or if you know someone who might be, please be in touch — my email address is at the bottom of this note.

As it has for almost 45 years, the VeloNews editorial team continues to evolve. Just as pro cycling teams shuffle their rosters from season to season — recent examples are well documented in our 2015 season preview issue — turnover within an editorial staff isn't just common, it's necessary. It will be refreshing to have new energy at the top of the *Velo* masthead, just as it will be good to have new voices in our race reporting and tech coverage. I'm very proud of the quality work our team produced during my time as Editor in Chief, but I'm also looking forward to seeing what comes next.

And no, you can't have any of my old VeloNews jerseys, so don't ask. I'll still be wearing them, proudly.

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A tall, clear glass filled with a vibrant red liquid, presumably tart cherry juice. A dynamic splash of golden, sparkling particles erupts from the top of the glass, forming a V-shape. Several whole red tart cherries are scattered on the surface in front of the glass base.

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VELONOTES»

House of cards

Russian sanctions threaten Tinkoff, Katusha teams By Andrew Hood

Tinkoff-Saxo team owner Oleg Tinkov shoots from the hip.

Beholden to no man, Tinkov's wealth offers him a license to speak his mind. So, after months of outrageous messages on Twitter, and offering up a one-million euro bounty to anyone who could win all three grand tours in one year, it was somewhat of a shock to see a subdued Tinkov in a sit-down interview with Bloomberg TV in December.

The 48-year-old Russian is, by his own admission, no billionaire oligarch. Even though he walked away with an estimated \$200 million in the Tinkoff Bank IPO in 2013, Tinkov's resources — and that of his bank — were being squeezed by dropping oil prices, the tanking Russian ruble, rising interest rates, and ever-tougher international sanctions due to Russia's involvement in Ukraine.

And he dropped a bombshell: if the Russian economy continued to spiral out of control, he could

lose his team.

"If the sanctions deteriorate the Russian economy, and share prices decline even more ... then the Tinkoff bank starts to suffer, then I stop my sponsorship," he said bluntly on Bloomberg TV. "I don't know as owner of the team if I will be able to find a substitution sponsor in Europe. Most likely,

I will not, and I will shut down the team."

As this issue went to print, it appeared Tinkoff-Saxo was secure for the 2015 season, but as Tinkoff Bank's stock price plummeted from \$15 a share to less than \$3, team CEO Stefano Feltrin admitted that the future looked grim.

"The team is fine for 2015. We are ready to go," Feltrin told *Velo*. "We are subject to the global situation, the global economy. It's definitely not a problem for 2015. It's more of a long-term worry."

It was an unexpected twist from a man who has been boasting of bottomless pockets, and dreams of building the world's best team, since buying out Bjarne Riis in 2013. Having brought in Peter Sagan on a three-year deal worth \$5 million per season, coupled with his GC superstar Alberto Contador, Tinkov seemed firmly in control.

ON TOP, FOR NOW
Tinkov (left) pays the salaries of star riders like Alberto Contador (right) and Peter Sagan, but that could change if Russian currency continues to struggle.



Team Katusha may also be in jeopardy.

Russian magnate and powerbroker Igor Makarov, who is deeply invested in natural gas, and whose personal fortune is worth a reported \$2 billion, is the primary moneyman behind the team. Makarov grew a personal fortune worth billions after cornering a good chunk of the Russian national gas market in the 1990s, having founded the ITERA natural gas company. Despite falling oil prices, Makarov seems secure with the majority of his fortune in natural gas, with prices staying stable over the past 12 months.

Makarov, who is also president of the Russian cycling federation, is a key powerbroker within Russian sport, and single-handedly helped spawn the Katusha cycling empire, which includes the WorldTour team as well as a Professional Continental team, Rusvelo, a development team, and infrastructure investments in velodromes and track racing.

The Katusha project was born in late 2008, with ambitions of reviving Russian cycling, which had lost its luster and support following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Despite ambitions to develop new Russian talent, most of Katusha's successes have come from foreign riders, most notably Spaniard Joaquim Rodriguez and Norwegian Alexander Kristoff. Efforts to create a Russian stage race have also stalled.

Makarov said ITERA spends in excess of \$65 million annually on all cycling projects, a sum that he hinted might be too much to carry without more support from the Russian government.

"At the moment, the Russian Ministry of Sport only partly finances Russian cycling, and most of the costs are covered by ITERA," Makarov said in a recent interview in Russian media. "This amounts to about 50 million euros per year ... one company alone cannot carry such a financial burden. I cannot predict this will continue in 2016."

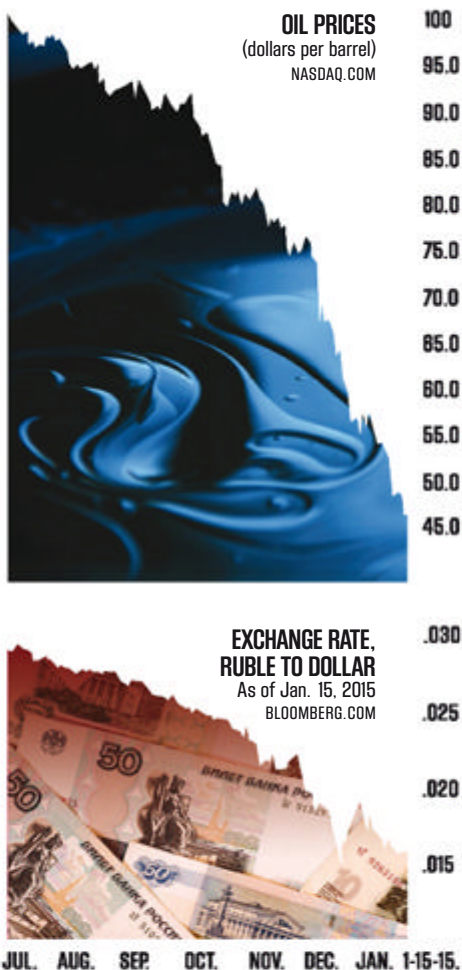
In the same interview, Makarov also suggested he would reconsider the Katusha project based on results in the 2015 season, when the team's current WorldTour license expires.

"A lot depends on the 2015 season," Makarov said. "A decision on applying for license renewal in the WorldTour will be made on the basis of the performance of Katusha in the first half of 2015. The same goes for Rusvelo."

A PERPETUAL HEADACHE

The Russian quandaries reveal just how tenuous sponsorships can be for major teams, and marks another chapter in a long history of teams coming and going in the night in the sport of professional cycling.

Going into 2015, the WorldTour league had shrunk to just 17 teams. The closure of Cannondale (which merged with Garmin-Sharp), and Europcar's demotion to second-tier Professional Continental status due to budget shortfalls, is



symptomatic of how thin the air is becoming at the top of the cycling pyramid.

A major team, with million-dollar salaries for GC stars and classics riders, as well as budget to cover support staff, travel, and infrastructure, runs upwards of \$20 million per year. Despite increasing budgets, and more professionalism, dozens of teams have come and gone over the past decade including Belkin, Vacansoleil, and Euskaltel.

Doping scandals have jettisoned more than a few major sponsors over the past few decades, including T-Mobile, Liberty Seguros, and Rabobank.

Other projects were little more than mirages. PinoRoad in Chile, a Continental team in South America, was built out of matchsticks, and more than a dozen riders were caught out without jobs in early 2014. The Pegasus project, which was supposed to be Australia's first WorldTour team, fizzled before it could get out of the start gate in 2011. Perhaps the most notorious was a project in 2005, linked to legendary Italian director Giancarlo Ferretti, with the promise of major sponsor from Sony Ericsson. That turned out to be an elaborate shell game, and the company publicly announced it had no intention, and never had any discussions about sponsoring a bike team.

Another infamous team was Rock Racing, backed by self-promoter Michael Ball, who signed

such tarnished riders as Tyler Hamilton, Santiago Botero, and Oscar Sevilla in 2008 and 2009. Ball, who was involved in countless lawsuits due to his "bad boy" behavior, could not sustain the cost of the team, and it ultimately imploded; Ball has since filed for bankruptcy.

Stories of riders not receiving salaries, and cases of phantom sponsors, have prompted the UCI to tighten its rules and review process for team budgets. Now teams must secure a bank guarantee covering one-third of its entire budget to cover salaries of riders and staff if sponsors vanish. The UCI license commission is also much stricter with its audits than ever before, but it isn't a perfect system. Riders from Team Colombia received late payments in 2014, and Europcar was locked out of a WorldTour license for 2015 because it couldn't meet the strict UCI financial requirements.

The hunt for sponsorship is a perpetual headache for team owners. Jonathan Vaughters' Slipstream organization had seen a parade of secondary sponsors before Garmin stepped up in 2008 to give the team stability. The merger with Cannondale for 2015 reconfirmed that team owners must constantly be on their toes to keep their projects above water.

"We don't make money as a racing team.

Basically, everything we get in sponsorship goes right back out the door in terms of expenses and salaries," said Cannondale-Garmin CEO Vaughters. "There are a lot of different ideas on how to monetize a sponsorship deal. It's difficult to change minds, and it's the teams that have to carry the costs."

That kind of financial uncertainty is one of the driving forces behind Velon, a new commercial venture backed by 11 major teams that was introduced in late 2014. Its backers hope to create new funding sources for teams that would allow owners to not have to rely on sponsorship to pay nearly all of their operating budgets. The teams still would like a slice of TV rights, which currently go to race promoters, such as ASO and RCS Sport, but they're already looking at new ideas. Merchandizing and capturing images from in-race video, which would be owned and sold via Velon, are just a few first steps the group is taking.

Change comes slow, and several major teams are balking on Velon including Movistar (which had a conflict over digital rights with its sponsor) as well as Katusha, Astana, and all of the major French teams. That can only mean that teams will continue to be caught out, either by the kind of international intrigue laying waste to Tinkov's dynastic plans, or by the simple fact that a sponsor decides to change its marketing budget.

Cycling has always been akin to a moving circus, but some insiders don't like the freak-show aspect of the business. Creating stability at the top won't come easy, or cheap. It is the owners of the Tour de France, ASO, that holds the purse strings. It makes money every July, with or without the likes of Oleg Tinkov.



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“I could say, ‘When Froome won the Tour, Contador was not at his usual level, and I didn’t ride. Who did he have to beat? No one!’ Or ‘Quintana won this year’s Giro because he attacked on a descent while the red flag was out.’ But I don’t do that. Each race has its own history. Basta!”

— Vincenzo Nibali, growing tired of questions about the legitimacy of his 2014 Tour de France victory, in an interview with *Sport/Voetbalmagazine*



“This is the best day of my life.”

— Heinrich Haussler (IAM Cycling), after winning the Australian national road title

“Valverde, he never attacks. He always hides in the bunch — but he’s still very hard to beat.”

— Philippe Gilbert (BMC Racing), on classics rival Alejandro Valverde (Movistar)



“The Tour de France podium and the world championship rainbow jersey are the two main objectives; I will go on hunting for them until I retire.”

— Alejandro Valverde (Movistar)

“I think Bradley Wiggins has the power, endurance, and the track skills for the Hour Record. If he prepares right for it, I’m sure he’ll smash it. I’ve got respect for the riders who have broken the record so far, but Wiggins is on a different level.”

— Former Hour Record holder Francesco Moser

“I don’t see myself doing many more years of this. Cycling demands a lot of sacrifices, and my friends and family are very important to me. At the maximum, I will have one more contract.... My intention is to retire at the top level, winning my last race. And I am not talking about some small race, but rather something much bigger. Specifically, the Tour.”

— Alberto Contador (Tinkoff-Saxo), all but confirming he will retire by the end of the 2017 season, if not before



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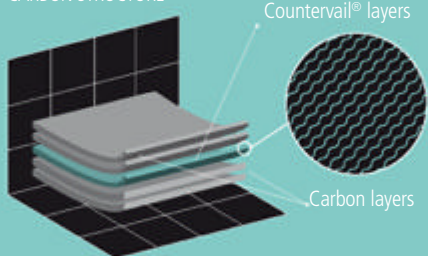
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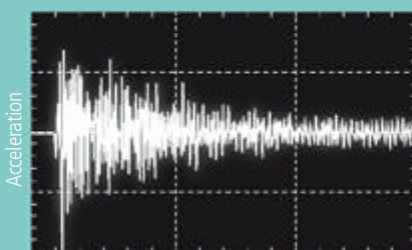
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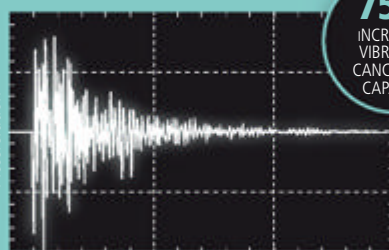


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a roadie sage by Phil Gaimon



I'm a collector. Can you send me a signed jersey or bottle?

I understand that fans want swag and souvenirs, but I don't have the stamps to cover it, even if I had the extra gear. If you can find your way to a race, teams often have things to give away at the bus, so if you're in the right place at the right time, you get to fight with other fans over our discarded, dirty bottles. Maybe it's easier to buy it from team websites (or signed books from philthethrill.net).

Sending emails or messages to random pros has never worked, as far as I know. It's worse if the note is in marginal English, and if you include a picture of your massive cycling swag collection and candid photos you've taken of me over the years, not only will you not get a bottle, but I might file for a restraining order. That said, if you'd like to contribute to my money collection, perhaps we could work something out.

Should ex-dopers be allowed to attend charity rides and gran fondos?

If a guy is banned or suspended, of course he shouldn't race, but as Moses chiseled into the Bill of Rights, "Thou shalt not disallow any man from riding a bike with friends."

The problem is that any time you get a pack of cyclists together for a ride, someone makes it a "race." I read a few angry internet posts about Levi Leipheimer winning an event called "Crusher in the Tushar" over the summer, how he was taking prize money and opportunities away from clean riders. It's always frustrating to lose, but I'm pretty sure that whatever prize money Levi won wouldn't buy him a bottle of scalp aftershave, and no one's getting contracts from winning unsanctioned dirt road races, even if they do have catchy, rhyming names. If anything, Levi's attendance might help an aspiring pro. No matter how hard the event is, beating a pack of weekend warriors doesn't impress anybody. But if you can beat Levi, sponsors might notice.

I do wonder why events invite those guys. They might bring media attention, but having Lance show up to your benefit ride would be like inviting the D.C. Sniper to an NRA event. Sure, he's a good shot and he's famous, but that's probably not the image you want. On the other hand, if Lance invites himself to your ride, well, now it depends on your interpretation of Moses. And try to have a catchy, rhyming name.

Phil Gaimon races for Optum-Kelly Benefit Strategies. His website is philthethrill.net.

Pro cyclists are in different countries almost every week. What do you do for a phone plan? Do teams provide cell phones?

I hear that Sky riders get cell phones and laptops, but I think they're the only ones. The rest of us have to handle our own, and some do it better than others. I won't tell you who, but one friend claims to have paid over 100,000 euros in fees to Vodafone over the last three years. Others carry multiple phones, or an envelope full of SIM cards, like skinny spies with shaved legs and bad tans. I opted for one phone with unlimited international data and texting, so it's great as long as you don't want to actually call anyone, and who calls anyone these days? Sky riders, I suppose.



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Retro modern

Pro cycling's new look takes cues from decades past **By Ryan Newill**

If there was a single moment of the 2014 season that captured cycling's retro undercurrent, it was Niki Terpstra standing atop the podium at Paris-Roubaix. In the old track's center, he held the coveted cobblestone aloft, his head adorned by a traditional cycling cap, brim turned up, rather than an embroidered baseball cap.

For nearly two solid decades, the cap had been absent from podiums, due to fashion trends, and absent from roads due to mandatory helmet rules, relegated to training rides and the wettest and coldest of races. But here it was again, honor restored.

Terpstra's win was more than a sartorial wink at cycling history, though; the sport's old ways were buried in his preparation as well. On his road to Roubaix, Terpstra took a page from the playbook of countryman and 1964 Roubaix winner, Peter Post; before tackling the cobbles, he hit the boards. Partnered with track-specialist-turned-road-racer Iljo Keisse, Terpstra won his second straight Zesdaagse van Rotterdam on the track in January before settling into his classics season.

For Terpstra, it proved a winning formula, and by October, he was back on the track, winning the Zesdaagse van Amsterdam with Yoeri Havik before riding to defend his Rotterdam title at the dawn of 2015. All in all, Terpstra's is a typical winter schedule for a classics rider — from 1975.

ROOTS REPRISÉ

In the mid-1990s, as Miguel Indurain rode toward his five consecutive Tour de France wins, cycling, long static, finally began to shift. Salaries increased, as did specialization. The talent pool deepened, and the Tour de France came to dominate the international cycling calendar. Stagnant for decades, road cycling technology began evolving as the mountain bike boom pumped money and new thinking into two-wheeled sport.

Over 20 years, pro cycling grew, modernized, and globalized, but it lost something in the process. The season lengthened, but the biggest stars raced fewer days as focused, power-based training replaced the old practice of racing into shape. The cost of potential injury rose, the days when grand tour contenders showed up in Belgium in March faded, and the era of the all-rounder — men like Merckx, Moser, and Hinault — drew to a close. Unique events like the

Grand Prix des Nations and Bordeaux-Paris succumbed to the focus on big tours and classics.

But today, even as cycling looks to establish a more sustainable business model, embrace new technology like on-bike cameras, and reconcile the poor choices of its past, it is returning to the more favorable aspects of previous decades.

THE RETURN OF VERSATILITY

To start, the multi-disciplinary rider is back. Riders like Post, Merckx, and De Vlaeminck once topped summers on the road with winters in the velodrome or the mud, but the practice has largely been anathema to WorldTour riders who find it neither financially necessary nor physiologically optimal. Recently, though, more top-flight riders are revisiting disciplines they pursued as amateurs or young pros.

Mark Cavendish returned to the boards over the winter, pairing with Keisse to ride to a close second place at the Zesdaagse Vlaanderen-Gent in November. For Cavendish, a two-time Madison world champion and a self-described student of the sport, Gent's creaky, history-laden t' Kuipke velodrome was a logical choice for his first six-day foray. While the men of Etixx-Quick-Step favor the track, others, like Frenchmen Sylvain Chavanel and Arnold Jeannson, drop into the occasional cyclocross race to face riders like Francis Mourey and Steve Chainel, who tilt their road/cross balance in the other direction.

Though he doesn't typically combine disciplines in a single season, Bradley Wiggins exem-

plifies the renewed sense of adventure at the top of the sport. Already a pursuit legend, Wiggins stretched himself from four-kilometer specialist to Tour de France winner. For an encore, he turned his attention to the spring and rode to a tactically savvy ninth place in the 2014 Roubaix, going wheel to wheel with the reigning kings of the cobbles. He finished the season with his first world TT title.

This season, Wiggins will take a final run at the stones with Sky before targeting the hour record, joining his eponymous Continental squad, and re-focusing on the track for the Rio Olympics. While the order of their achievements varies, it's a career profile that Moser — Roubaix and Giro d'Italia winner, world pursuit champion, and former Hour Record holder — could see his reflection in.

GREATEST HITS OF THE 1980S

While Wiggins has reached the pinnacle of a surprising range of disciplines, nobody in men's



TIM DE WAELE

cycling can match the versatility on display in the women's peloton, where phenom Marianne Vos and reigning world champion Pauline Ferrand-Prévot both ride at the highest level across road, mountain, and cyclocross. If all goes according to plan, though, their throwback skillsets won't be the only parallel to the 1980s in women's racing.

Following the success of La Course, the women's circuit race held on the Champs-Élysées at the 2014 Tour, ASO chairman Jean-Etienne Amaury revealed to Bloomberg News that the organization was actively seeking sponsors for a more extensive women's Tour. It is an event that has been lacking on paper since 2005, when the withered, four-day Grande Boucle Féminine finally died. But in reality, there has been nothing resembling a true women's Tour de France since the late 1980s.

Running concurrently with the men's Tour, the inaugural 1984 Tour de France Féminine comprised the same 21 stages, including every mountain pass, but trimmed opening kilometers to meet UCI rules restricting women's distances. It was an ambitious and ultimately unsustainable model, but should ASO throw its weight and experience behind a substantial new women's Tour, it could give the same boost to today's women's cycling as that groundbreaking 1984 race did, and instantly lend increased credibility, visibility, and prestige to cycling's most underrated property.

The 1980s echo through the men's Tour, as well, as revitalized connections between Colombian and European racing have created opportunities for a new generation of Colombians to build on the work of their pioneering countrymen. In 1987, Lucho Herrera's Vuelta a España win put Colombia firmly on the world cycling map, and a year later, Fabio Parra became the first Colombian to stand on the Tour podium. Twenty-five years later, Nairo Quintana did Parra one better, finishing second to Froome at the 2013 Tour and following in Herrera and Parra's footsteps, respectively, by capturing the polka dot and white jerseys. He followed up by adding the 2014 Giro d'Italia to Herrera's Vuelta title, with countryman Rigoberto Urán following in second place. Both men are likely to return to the Tour this year, with countrymen including Darwin Atapuma, Sergio Henao, and Carlos Betancur hoping to match their successes.

NUOVO RECORD

If images of road stars on the track recall the 1970s, and Colombians electrifying the Tour evoke the 1980s, then the return of the Hour Record will bring a taste of the 1990s to 2015.

Resuscitated by recent rule changes that traded anachronistic technical restrictions and multiple records for contemporary standards and a unified title, the Hour has reached prominence unseen since the 1990s, when Graeme Obree, Chris Boardman, Indurain, and Tony Rominger upped the mark seven times in just over three years.

Retiring headbanger and fan favorite Jens Voigt stepped up to set the first mark under the new rule, riding 51.1 kilometers in Grenchen, Switzer-

land, and, in the process, demonstrating how cycling's storied past could mingle with its future. To his attempt at cycling's transgenerational measuring stick — the domain of immortals like Coppi, Anquetil, and Merckx — Voigt's team brought live streaming internet coverage, custom graphics, and a playlist tailored to the phases of the effort. Interest followed, and traffic for the event on VeloNews.com rivaled that of a Tour de France stage.

With the gauntlet thrown down, IAM's Mathias Brändle topped Voigt's mark just six weeks later, and Rohan Dennis and Jack Bobridge quickly stated their intent to ride for the record in 2015. Both men have solid track credentials and present credible threats to Brändle's mark. Alex Dowsett, Alex Rasmussen, and Thomas Dekker have thrown their hats in the ring as well, but of those who have expressed interest, one stands above: Wiggins. A new mark by the world time trial champion could be impressive in its own right, but it could also draw out Tony Martin and Fabian Cancellara, who has expressed interest but also grumbled over the currently low bar. The result could be an all-out assault on the record by the sport's most capable time trialists, yielding distances approaching those reached with the controversial "Superman" and "Egg" positions of the 1990s.

Across disciplines, genders, and continents, top flight cycling, for so long driven by a pursuit of what's next, is again drawing on some of the better aspects of its past. Why the change? Is it the levity that comes with a tentative emergence from some of cycling's darkest days? Is it an acknowledgment that what fans love about cycling amounts to more than faster climbing and repeat victories? Is it that something in the spirit of the sport was lost, but not irretrievably so? Whatever the reason, the season ahead will see more flashes of the sport's past, some more easily recognizable than others.

Dutch phenom Mathieu van der Poel will likely see firsthand how cycling evolves over the next two decades. The scion of a cycling family that includes father Adri van der Poel, one of the last great all-rounders, and grandfather Raymond Poulidor, a Tour legend, 19-year-old Mathieu owns a pair of junior world 'cross titles, to which he added the junior world road crown in 2013. He has already claimed elite 'cross victories over riders like Sven Nys, Kevin Pauwels, and Lars van der Haar. Will he ultimately choose the road, as young 'cross achievers like Lars Boom and Zdenek Stybar have, commit himself fully to 'cross, like Nys, or will he split time between the disciplines like his father, hanging national and world 'cross champion's jerseys alongside trophies from Flanders and Liège?

That decision likely remains years away. But whichever route he chooses, it seems that the time for the Van der Poel name has come again, just as it has for the all-rounder, the Tour Féminine, the Colombians, the impossible Hour, and the lowly cycling cap. **V**

Follow Ryan Newill on Twitter @SC_Cycling.

WINNING

TREE HUGGERS

Tree conservationists successfully postpone final day of cyclocross nationals in Austin



GRAND AMBITION

Contador going for the Giro-Tour double

KFC!

Compton extends national CX title streak to an unbelievable 11



DIVERSE AMBITION

Wiggins to go out in blaze of cobblestone glory before focusing on track

RIDING IN CIRCLES

Four legitimate attempts on the Hour Record in the next two months



SAME AS IT EVER WAS

UCI granting Astana's WorldTour license feels a lot like toothless governance

THE RUSSIAN RUBLE

Tinkoff Credit Systems on the brink of implosion; team dominance may not last long



NATIONALS DISASTER

USA Cycling ultimately responsible for executing due diligence in venue selection, organization, and issue mitigation of any event it promotes



LOSING

Sitting In with Greg Van Avermaet

By Andrew Hood

Will Greg Van Avermaet be cycling's nearly man? Or will the BMC Racing star finally break out for that elusive major victory in 2015? This season could prove decisive in the trajectory of the 29-year-old Belgian.

His 2014 season certainly wasn't bad. Van Avermaet won three races, good enough to earn him the best rider from Flanders prize. But it was what he didn't win that caused some to wonder if Van Avermaet will ever win a big one. He was second at Omloop Het Nieuwsblad in February to Ian Stannard (Sky), and second in stage 2 of the Tour de France, losing to the attacking Vincenzo Nibali (Astana). He took a heartbreaking second place at the Ronde van Vlaanderen (Tour of Flanders), when he was clearly the strongest rider in the race; the losses could forever haunt him. Yet Van Avermaet insists that those close calls only fuel his ambition going into 2015, when he believes he will finally win when it matters most.

In 2014, you came close to winning in major races, but never quite did it. Do you look back at your season with pride or frustration?

I was very happy with how things went. I was always close to the victory, all season long, so that shows I am at a new level. I was always making important progressions. The gap is getting smaller and smaller to come close to winning a big classic. For sure, I want to beat those guys, and I am closer than ever.

What do you need to do to get that big win?

Well, keep working, keep trying, and maybe [get] a little luck. I lost a few races perhaps due to my sprint, so I can work on that a little bit this season. I know I have a lot of power at the end of a long, hard race. I am still only 29, and the best years for a classics rider come in your 30s. I think I can still improve.

What are your biggest goals for 2015?

The worlds will be another good chance for me. I just missed the podium in Ponferrada [fifth], and I think Richmond will be a course for my characteristics. The Tour de France also looks good for me. Again, I was close to winning a stage last year, so I would like to be there for what looks like a very interesting first week. The Tour of Flanders is the big goal. That's one that I really want to win.

Your team gave you captain status during 2014. How important was that for you?

I was always winning races as a U23 and early in my career, but I think I was losing that edge. I know I still have that killer instinct, and it helped a lot that the team put their confidence in me last season. I think I reacted well. I showed to the team I have the ability to attack and make the race. It gives me even more confidence going into 2015. There is pressure that comes with that, but it's what I want.

We saw Philippe Gilbert do a lot of work for you during the world championship as part of the Belgian national team. Do you have any conflicts when you race together at BMC Racing?

Not really, because we are on different programs, with me for the northern classics, and Phil for the Ardennes. And the races where we might be together, such as Milano-Sanremo, it's also better to have two options.

Would you be happy with your career if you never won a race like Flanders?

I've had a good career, I've won my fair share of races, but I've missed out on a few as well. I've never won a stage in the Tour, or a big classic. I really want that big win. I've been waiting pretty long for it.



COR VOS

KNOWLEDGE is POWER

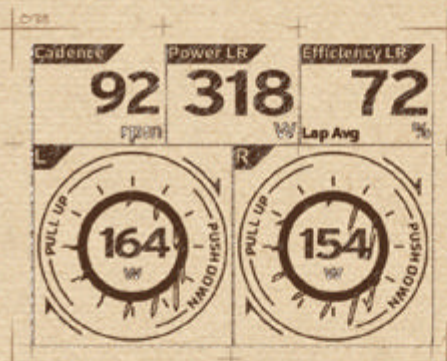


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GENERATION NEXT

‘Class of 1990’ poised to dominate this season BY ANDREW HOOD



Sometimes major changes don't happen in one dramatic, singular event. Instead, transformation can often come like drops of water that go unnoticed until suddenly turning into a torrent, washing everything away.

That's what's been quietly happening inside the peloton over the past few years. Riders such as Alberto Contador (Tinkoff-Saxo) and Fabian Cancellara (Trek Factory Racing) might still be at the top of their respective games, but by their own admission, their time is short for the pro ranks. The tide is changing, and a new generation of riders is poised to step front and center. And 2015 could well be the tipping point.

Younger riders are entering the peloton more than ever, and many are having unprecedented success at a very young age. A surprisingly high number of those rising stars belong to what's called, at least in Europe, the "Class of 1990." Unlike Americans, who link generations to a graduation year, Europeans tend to cluster athletes around the year they were born. And 1990 was a very good year indeed, at least when it came to producing world-class cyclists.

The list is impressive by any measure. Here are just a few of the top names in the Class of 1990: Peter Sagan (Tinkoff-Saxo), Nairo Quintana (Movistar), Nacer Bouhanni (Cofidis), Taylor Phinney (BMC Racing), Moreno Moser (Cannondale-Garmin), Fabio Aru (Astana), and Thibaut Pinot (FDJ).

It's not that this generation is arriving; it's already here. In 2014, Quintana won the Giro d'Italia, Pinot punched onto the Tour de France podium, and Sagan claimed his third consecutive green jersey. To put an exclamation point on his peers' success, Michal Kwiatkowski (Etixx-Quick-Step) won the world title in Ponferrada, Spain, becoming the youngest world champion since Oscar Freire of Spain won in 1999 at 23.

"It's nice to see us young guys winning at the pro level," said Kwiatkowski. "I've been racing against Sagan since I was a teenager. Now we're both at the top. That says a lot."

But what does it say, exactly? Lumping together riders by their birth date, and calling it a generational shift, seems arbitrary at best. Riders born the previous year, in 1989, such as Matteo Trentin (Etixx-Quick-Step) or Rafal Majka (Tinkoff-Saxo),

or the year after, in 1991, such as Joe Dombrowski (Cannondale-Garmin) and Warren Barguil (Giant-Alpecin), have also earned big results. And had Sagan, the leader of this new band of riders, been born a few weeks earlier, he would have been lumped together with the "Class of '89".

Yet they do stand above. Anecdotal or not, the much-hyped Class of 1990 means a lot, not only for their quality results, but for what it represents for the sport of professional cycling. Not only have these riders become the cyclists of reference inside the peloton, with Sagan in the classics, Quintana in the grand tours, and Bouhanni or Michael Matthews (Orica-GreenEdge) in the sprints, they also represent a fresh start for a sport desperate to turn the page on its tainted past.

"The fact that young riders are winning big races right now says a lot about the peloton, and how it's changed," said Cannondale-Garmin CEO Jonathan Vaughters. "In a cleaner peloton, younger riders have a bigger chance of winning than when everyone is doped up."

The idea behind that argument is that older, more experienced riders, and their bodies, can better handle the rigors of doping, and racing while doped, than younger, cleaner riders. Take away the doping, and the natural talent and explosiveness that comes with youth has a better chance to shine.

Of course, young riders still cheat today, as evidenced by the rash of doping cases inside the Astana development squad last year, but it is widely believed that today's younger riders have not had doping practices pushed on them to the same degree as the previous generations. Phinney, one of the marquee names of the Class of 1990, said he's never had to deal with the doping question in his career.

"If I could get second place in the worlds time trial [2012], and two fourth places in the 2012 Olympics, and considering that I am 100 percent 'pan y agua,' then that says a lot about where the sport is right now," Phinney said in an earlier interview with *Velo*. "All the younger riders I know, we've never been told about doping, or told to dope. Today, the teams do not want us

to dope."

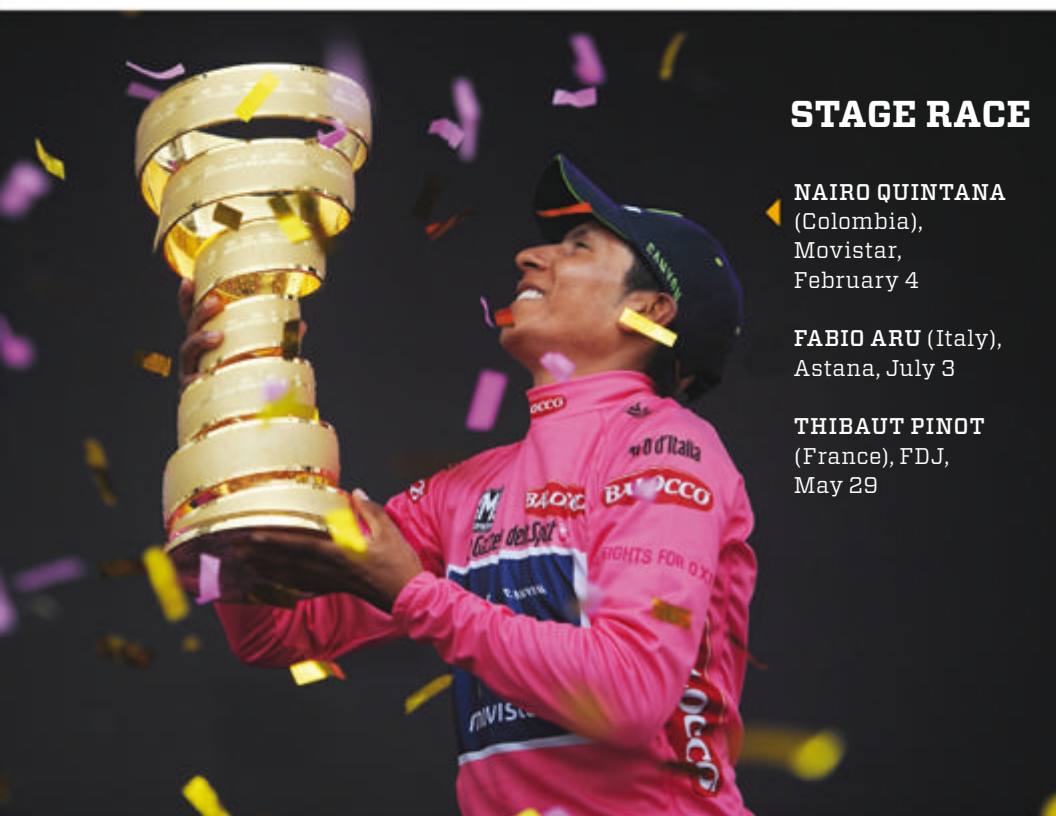
Unfortunately for Phinney, who broke his leg in a crash during U.S. nationals in May, his ability to fulfill his potential as one of the shining lights of his generation is a question mark. He might be able to come back from his complicated injury, but whether or not he will be bashing elbows with Sagan across the cobbles at Paris-Roubaix remains to be seen.

YOUTH MARKETING

Another undeniable trend, and one that favors the Class of 1990, is the push by teams to sign younger riders. Part of it goes back to the doping issue. Riders with questionable pasts, or those who are coming back from racing bans, are finding it more difficult to find a contract. Of course, there are exceptions, such as Alejandro Valverde, who slotted right back in with Movistar after his two-year ban from links to Operación Puerto. But teams are more likely to sign younger, untainted riders than potentially risk losing their sponsorship on dodgy riders.



THE CLASS OF 1990 - MOST LIKELY TO WIN A...



STAGE RACE

▶ **NAIRO QUINTANA**
(Colombia), Movistar,
February 4

FABIO ARU (Italy),
Astana, July 3

THIBAUT PINOT
(France), FDJ,
May 29

CLASSIC

PETER SAGAN
(Slovakia), Tinkoff-
Saxo, January 26

MICHAL
KWIATKOWSKI
(Poland), Etixx-Quick-
Step, June 2



▶ **MORENO MOSER**
(Italy), Cannondale-
Garmin, December 25

JESUS
HERRADA
(Spain), Movistar,
July 26



TIME TRIAL

TAYLOR PHINNEY
(USA), BMC Racing,
June 27



ROHAN DENNIS ▶
(Australia), BMC
Racing, May 28



▶ **TOM DUMOULIN** ▶
(The Netherlands),
Giant-Alpecin,
November 11

FIELD SPRINT



NACER BOUHANNI ▶
(France), Cofidis,
July 25



▶ **MICHAEL MATTHEWS**
(Australia),
Orica-GreenEdge,
September 26

Another key component of today's youth movement is economic. Younger riders come cheap. And with top-tier pros, such as Contador or Chris Froome (Sky) earning upwards of \$5 million per year, teams still need warm bodies to fill out their rosters. Rather than spend \$200,000 on a 30-year-old pro who's solid, but perhaps never wins, teams are more apt to sign two or perhaps three promising riders on the same money, and give them a chance. That's true across almost every major team. Quintana, for example, had an annual salary of \$65,000 when he finished second to Froome at the 2013 Tour. He's since been bumped into a two-year deal reportedly worth \$4 million.

"We like to sign young riders, and develop their talent. I think that's a big change from when I turned pro," said Matt White, sport director at Orica-GreenEdge. "Back in the day, teams wanted established pros, and it was quite hard to get on a big team as a rookie. Now we want to sign them young, build them up within our system, and then see what they can do."

Instead of signing a big-money GC rider, Orica-GreenEdge is tapping another promising rider of the Class of 1990 — Colombian Esteban Chaves — to develop him into a grand tour rider. White is also hoping to see big things from the twin Yates brothers, who were born in 1991.

Teams are also dedicating resources on development and scouting more than ever before. Not only does the UCI encourage teams to sign neo-pros, the competition between the top teams to find promising, talented riders is more intense than ever. Top teams like BMC Racing, Sky, and Tinkoff-Saxo assign their respective sport directors and coaches to watch prescribed parts of the world, just to keep an eye out for the next Sagan or Quintana. The bidding wars for young riders can ramp up, and highly touted young pros are receiving huge money for races they haven't won yet, just because teams are loathe to see a young rider go to a rival squad.

BMC, for example, has thrown its lot into young talent for 2015. Longtime captain Cadel Evans retired after the Santos Tour Down Under in January, and other veterans, such as Thor Hushovd, Samuel Sánchez, and Alessandro Ballan, are no longer on the team. Rather than pay millions for an established star to fill that void, they're investing in youth. First, by backing Tejay van Garderen (born in 1988) for the Tour, and behind that, giving such riders as Rohan Dennis (another member of the Class of 1990) and the even younger Rick Zabel (1993) a chance to shine.

"With Rick, it goes back to the question of when it's right to turn pro. If we didn't take him, someone else would have. He's got the talent, it's up to us to nurse him along," said BMC sporting manager Allan Peiper. "Rohan Dennis

is an exciting prospect. He's got the pedigree to ride grand tours. You can see that he has the qualities of what we call 'la grande classe.' We think he could go far, but we won't know that for a few years."

Perhaps coincidentally, there was a wave of retirements in 2014. Riders such as Evans, Hushovd, Andy Schleck, and David Millar are among a few of the top riders who've moved on. Jens Voigt, the oldest rider in the peloton over the past four seasons, finally walked away after nearly 20 years in the sport.

"I knew it was time for me to leave when the only guys I knew in the peloton were the sport directors," said the charismatic Voigt, who retired at the end of 2014. "Some of these guys were just babies when I started to race!"

Voigt was not exaggerating. In 2014, Voigt was 42, while such riders as Caleb Ewan (Orica-GreenEdge) and Zabel were barely 20, certainly not of drinking age, at least not during the Amgen Tour of California.

There is also a sense of destiny among many young riders in the peloton, who sense their time has come. The Class of 1990 will be turning 25 during the 2015 season, meaning they're entering the best years of their careers.

GENERATION CLASH

Today's established superstars are already sensing that these young bucks are nipping at their heels. Sagan's move to Tinkoff-Saxo, where he will likely see more support both on and off the bike than he did at Cannondale, hasn't gone unnoticed by his rivals.

"We will see how Sagan improves with Tinkoff. He's already pretty good!" said BMC's Philippe Gilbert. "He's been three years at the top already. I hope he doesn't improve much more, because it would be very hard to beat him."

Another thing that stands out about the riders of the Class of 1990 is their quality. Kwiatkowski already owns the rainbow stripes. Sagan is king of green. And Quintana will be taking aim at the Tour de France, with hopes of becoming the first Latin American winner of the yellow jersey.

"Riders like Nairo only come once in a generation," said Movistar general manager Eusebio Unzué, who's worked with such riders as Miguel Indurain, Pedro Delgado, and Valverde. "There are racers who broke the mold, who are simply born to be great bike riders. No one knows why. It's a mystery. We are fortunate to have Nairo with us, and I believe he has the capacity to become one of the greats of the sport."

The stakes are unquestionably huge going into 2015. Today's marquee names, such as Contador, Cancellara, Tom Boonen (Etixx-Quick-Step), and Bradley Wiggins (Sky), have already confirmed they'll likely be retired within a year or two. The sport needs new dynamic, exciting, legitimate stars to drive fan and media interest.

Tinkoff-Saxo has high hopes that Sagan can

MOST LIKELY TO BE A ROULEUR

LUKE ROWE (Great Britain), Sky, March 10



SONNY COLBRELLI (Italy) Bardiani-CSF, May 17



FABIO FELLINE (Italy), Trek Factory Racing, March 29



ANDREW FENN (Great Britain), Sky, July 1



become a star much bigger than cycling. His agent, Giovanni Lombardi, compared Sagan to MotoGP pilot Valentino Rossi, a personality who can reach beyond the cycling core, and capture the imagination of the mainstream public.

"We hope that Peter can really grow into a bigger star than just cycling," Lombardi said. "Of course, it's only if he wants it, but he has the quality and charisma to be someone who excites the public. That would be very important for cycling, to have a high-profile personality to carry the sport forward."

First, Sagan has to win a monument or two, something Tinkoff-Saxo believes the Slovakian can do. Ex-pro Bobby Julich will lead Tinkoff's new coaching staff, and will personally work with Sagan.

"Peter will have the support of the team, he will have the best coaching, the best equipment, and he's targeting the big races with us," said Tinkoff CEO Stefano Feltrin. "We believe Peter can win many important races. We're hoping to help him reach his full potential. He's already so good. It seems to be simply a question of time."

MOST LIKELY TO WIN A SUMMIT FINISH

ESTEBAN CHAVES (Colombia), Orica-GreenEdge, January 17



ROMAIN BARDET (France), Ag2r La Mondiale, November 9



That's a lot of burden to put on the shoulders of young men. Not only is the future of the sport hanging on their shoulders, they have massive pressure to meet and surpass expectations. They are expected to win the sport's biggest races, and at the same time, do it in a credible and believable way, acting as media-savvy public ambassadors.

They seem to be up to the task. The likes of Sagan, Kwiatkowski, Quintana, and Phinney are certainly not lacking confidence. That's one of advantage of being young. There's a sense of brashness, self-assurance, and youthful exuberance that inevitably melts away with the passing of years, disappointment, injury, and betrayal.

"It's a very exciting time in cycling right now," BMC's Peiper said. "I've never seen so many good, young riders coming into the peloton. I think we're going to have some great racing ahead of us in the next few years."

The old guard still might have a thing or two to say about that. And the inevitable clash of generations could make 2015 one of the best ever.



Set to SHINE

Australian Michael “Bling” Matthews looks to continue his rise and give Orica-GreenEdge another crack at the world title in Richmond

By Aaron S. Lee

Michael Matthews is living proof that, sometimes, what you see is not necessarily what you get.

When the gold-plated, diamond-encrusted 24-year-old Aussie rolls up to his multi-million dollar two-bedroom apartment in Monaco in his six-figure Porsche Cayenne GTS, with personalized plates bearing his nickname, “Bling,” it would be easy to assume that such excess at a young age meant Matthews was either spoiled or narcissistic — or both.

That is until the Canberra native sits down and speaks.

The articulate Orica-GreenEdge rider never seems to use the word ‘I’ and subconsciously opts for the word ‘we’ instead. Matthews is quick to point out that while all that glitters may indeed be gold, he is also the first to admit that he has received a lot of assistance on his way to collecting his riches. Whether from teammates, his fiancée Katrina, his coach Brian Stephens, his mentor Baden Cooke, his childhood hero Michael Rogers (Tinkoff-Saxo), or his fans, Matthews is openly grateful.

Indeed, even the Australian government gets a nod as Matthews lists those for which

he is appreciative.

“We are very lucky in Australia to receive the support we get from the government, the [Institute of Sport], and the public also,” Matthews told *Velo* in December, during a pre-season training camp in Switzerland with 11 of his teammates. “It all goes a long way in helping us perform at our best and live out our dreams.”

Winning bike races and fulfilling expectations are nothing new for the 2010 under-23 world road champion. Matthews has 17 World-Tour wins to his credit in his five-year career, which started at age 18 with Jayco Skins, before moving on to Rabobank (2011-12) and then GreenEdge in 2013. But four of those victories are much more special: Matthews has picked up three individual stage wins at the Vuelta a España and one at the Giro d'Italia.

In total, Matthews has already worn the leader's jersey at two of pro cycling's three grand tours, including three days in red at the Vuelta and six days in pink at the Giro.

With so much individual success, it might

come as a surprise to learn that the most memorable moment in the young career of the 2009 Oceania road and time trial champion came on the opening stage of this year's Giro, in Belfast, after he and eight other GreenEdge riders won the team time trial. The team agreed to gift Canadian Svein Tuft with the maglia rosa on a day when he not only crossed the line first, but also celebrated his 37th birthday.

“We nailed the team time trial; we were going into that race with a really good group and pretty confident of our chances, considering we are so strong in that discipline,” admitted Matthews. “In retrospect, wearing the pink jersey at the Giro was great, and getting a pink bike from Scott was pretty cool, too.”

“But when we took the win, it was pretty emotional for me personally, because I had never won a team time trial at that sort of level with such an amazing group of guys. The best part was that we all agreed before the race that Svein would take the jersey on his birthday, which was so special because he does so much work for us and each race he puts everything on the line and doesn't always get the attention he deserves. But at



THE 2015 SEASON WILL BE A SUCCESS IF...
Matthews wins Milano-Sanremo and/or a stage of the Tour de France

THE 2015 SEASON WILL BE A FAILURE IF... Matthews crashes and is again unable to start the Tour de France

the end of the day it was really nice to give him the pink jersey because he was the strongest rider on the team that day, and I know it made for one of the highlights of his career."

Matthews' acknowledgment and appreciation of Tuft's selflessness offers a glimpse into the culture and bonds that permeate the Orica-GreenEdge organization, including its riders, soigneurs, sports directors, and staff.

"Teamwork runs pretty deep between the riders at GreenEdge; the way the guys put their own race on the line for the good of others is like no other team you will see in the WorldTour peloton," said Matthews, who struggled on Rabobank for two years due, in large part, to language and cultural barriers. "We have a job at the start of the race and whoever is the best rider on the day, that's who we work for."

However, that camaraderie could be put to the test in 2015, after teammate and fellow puncheur Simon Gerrans suffered a broken collarbone while on a training ride aboard a mountain bike in December.

With the 34-year-old Victorian expecting to miss the first six weeks of the new year, including his title defenses at both the Australian national championship and the Tour Down Under, the 2014 UCI road worlds silver medalist will join Matthews in a mid-March start. And, perhaps, Gerrans will enter the season with like-minded aspirations for the worlds title in Richmond come September.

Orica-GreenEdge sports director Matt White spoke with *Velo* on the day of Gerrans' surgery, saying he had tentatively ruled out the notion of bringing Matthews to Australia from his home base in Monaco as a replacement for the reigning two-time national road champion and three-time Tour Down Under winner.

"We will be leaving Michael on his original program, which is him starting his season at Paris-Nice," said White. "He has been preparing to start his season in March, and bringing his season forward by seven weeks isn't fair on him and could then change his plans for Richmond."

Matthews' calculated program is intended to keep his legs fresh for a shot at the road worlds in September.

However, White also admitted that the delayed start for Gerrans could mean the 2014 silver medalist may now target next year's course in Virginia as well.

"Simon wasn't going to put as much focus on the worlds," said White. "With the program we were running with him, he would have been lucky to not be running on fumes by the time he got to Richmond. But now he's not going to start racing until mid-March."

"Gerrans obviously has a lot more experience on that level, but Michael Matthews is on a very steep learning curve at the moment when it comes to big championship events," White said.

Regardless of Gerrans' injury and delayed start, Matthews is unfazed.

"Richmond is looking pretty good so far,"

Matthews said. "I am planning my year around the world championships also, as this is one year that suits me really well. But there are riders with the same characteristics as me, so I will have to be in 110-percent shape to achieve that goal, and hopefully I'll have the support I'm looking for in the team to help me win that race."

One potential pre-race favorite for worlds, who boasts similar traits, is 26-year-old John Degenkolb (Giant-Alpecin). The German finished a close second to Matthews at the U23 world championships in Geelong, Australia, in 2010. While Matthews agreed Degenkolb is a threat moving forward, the confident Australian claims the two riders are heading in opposite directions in terms of style.

"We are slowly adapting into different riders," Matthews said. "Degenkolb is slowly becoming a Paris-Roubaix or Flanders sort of rider, while I believe I am becoming more of an Amstel Gold, Milano-Sanremo, Flèche Wallonne type of rider."

"I'm sure we will be butting heads in future grand tour stages or at the worlds, but when it comes down to smaller bunch sprints, he will normally come out on top. He is a really good guy and competitor and I love racing him whether I come first or second; it's always the best man wins."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR MATTHEWS?

There is still one grand tour leader's jersey Matthews hasn't worn, and it's golden yellow. An inaugural Tour de France start eluded him last year after he was injured in a training accident just days prior to the start. But according to Matthews, claiming the maillot jaune is not a priority anytime soon.

"I had a few crashes and made a few mistakes in some races in 2014, but we still had some good results which is really nice after such a hard year," he said. "But next year we are looking to step up even more."

"[I'm] not focusing too much on the yellow jersey, but if the yellow jersey comes, it comes. But it's not my top goal at the moment."

With a new year rolling over, Matthews is trying to enjoy the moment while still looking forward to what lies ahead.

"It's sort of difficult to get my head around what we actually achieved this year at the age of 23," said Matthews, who turned 24 in late September. "I think I just need to pinch myself a few times. Every time I wake up, I go into our second bedroom and check all the pink jerseys around the house and it's becoming true to me and starting to soak in."

"I think next year is another year and we just keep moving forward, and hopefully for me it's not the end of my winning streak."

Aaron S. Lee is a cycling and triathlon columnist for Eurosport Australia and a contributor to Velo.

Soul SURVIVOR

Movistar's
Eusebio Unzué
rediscovers
the magic with
Nairo Quintana

By Andrew Hood
PAMPLONA, Spain



QUINTANA



COURTESY MOVISTAR (2)

A four-day pre-season Movistar team camp was winding down in the foothills of the Pyrenees, on the outskirts of Pamplona, a town forever linked to Ernest Hemingway and the Running of the Bulls. It was late November, with a hint of winter in the air, but the mood was festive.

Spain's last great cycling team had just come off another banner season, winning the prestigious WorldTour team prize for the second year running, capped by the consecration of its latest and perhaps greatest jewel, with Nairo Quintana winning the Giro d'Italia.

Riders and staff dug into thin slices of jamón serrano and nursed glasses of ochre-red rioja wine. Holding court was Eusebio Unzué, the flamboyant team manager who has thrived and survived across the arc of Spain's cycling highs and lows dating back 35 years. From Spain's golden age of Pedro Delgado and Miguel Indurain in the 1980s and 1990s, through the turbulence of the EPO era, to today's generation, personified by plucky Colombian climber Quintana, Unzué has seen it all. At 59, his trademark floppy bang still sweeps low across his forehead, and entering his fourth decade on the front lines of the sport, his childlike enthusiasm for cycling remains undeniably intact.

"I haven't been this excited for a coming season in a long time," Unzué told *Velo*. "Nairo Quintana is the most talented rider I've seen since Indurain, and we're going to the Tour de France this year to try to win. That energizes the entire organization."

Unzué's bubbling optimism was visibly contagious. The room was abuzz with possibility. And after four days of meetings, riders and staffers would soon be heading home to be with family and friends. With a long season in the history books, and a new one looming on the horizon, riders came up to Unzué almost single-file to bid farewell, to pay respects, and give thanks. Unzué runs a tight ship, but he's no Mafioso don who operates on fear. Instead, he's a father-like figure who watches proudly over his growing brood.

In line was Beñat Intxausti, the rider who many expected to be Spain's next great GC contender, but hasn't quite delivered. Unzué, however, continues to believe, and will bring him to the Giro to lead the team. Next are the Izagirre twins, who do everything in unison. Fran Ventoso, to whom Unzué gave a lifeline just the week before to keep him on the team for 2015, was nearly tearful in his appreciation. Alejandro Valverde, who recently signed a three-year contract extension that will keep him with "los blues" through 2017, slapped Unzué on the back with a smile, and said, "Nos veremos pronto." See you soon.

"Alejandro is so humble for such a great champion. He's been at the top of the sport for

15 years, and he has absolutely no ego," Unzué shakes his head in admiration and disbelief. "I've never seen anyone like him in cycling."

The last to approach Unzué is Quintana, with his younger brother, Dayer, in tow. The Colombian sensation hardly looks like a rider who could shake the sport to its foundation, but Unzué is convinced Quintana could be the Eddy Merckx of Latin America. Quintana is heading to Monaco, where he recently established his new European base, before circling back to Colombia until his season debut at the Tour de San Luis in January. He likely won't see Unzué again until February or March.

"It's an honor to race with a team with so much history, and to have riders like Alejandro committed to helping me," Quintana said. "This team has supported me when no one knew who I was, and I hope to pay them back with some important victories."

Unzué is certainly hoping so. After his controversial decision to keep Quintana out of the 2014 Tour de France, Movistar will ride into July with the full intention of winning the yellow jersey.

It's just like old times for Unzué, and he's clearly relishing the moment.

UPS AND DOWNS

Rory Sutherland, one of four new arrivals for 2015, cannot believe his luck. In 2013, Bjarne Riis signed him to come back to Europe, but the Australian couldn't quite find his place in Bjarne's Army. Rather than race to support Alberto Contador in the 2014 Tour, Sutherland didn't even start a grand tour last year. He jumped at the chance to come to Movistar in a two-year deal, and after four days of meetings with his new boss, he was sure he made the right choice.

"This is unlike any team I've been on. It's more like a family, with everyone working together," Sutherland told *Velo*. "If you look at the roster, these riders have been here for decades. Pablo Lastras has been riding here 17 years. Riders don't go somewhere else. If they're good enough, they stay here because it's a good place to be. It's very much a family environment, and they hold the group together."

Sutherland's observation is true. José Luis Arieta and Chente García both began their careers as "gregarios" at the tail end of Indurain's run, and now they're sport directors. Both have been with Unzué since they were teenagers. José Luis Jaimerena even more so; he raced with Unzué in



UNZUÉ

the 1980s, and now is Unzué's main confidante and top sport director.

"Eusebio has his own style. He's very relaxed and patient, but also very organized and driven to succeed," Jaimerena said. "You saw that last year with his decision not to take Nairo to the Tour. Just about every other team would have, but Unzué knew that for Nairo's long-term future, it was more prudent not to."

Unzué certainly has the virtue of being able to take the long view. Perhaps no one in the contemporary peloton, except Patrick Lefevere at Quick-Step or Marc Sergeant at Lotto, has lasted as long.

Unzué is the first to admit that it hasn't been easy. His first touch with cycling came after his attempts to become a professional sputtered, and he signed on as a sport director for a small amateur team in Navarro in 1974. Little did he know then that those first steps would be a journey of a lifetime.

"Times have certainly changed. I remember our first team budget was 70,000 euros for the entire operation," Unzué said. "Today, team budgets are more than 20 million euros. It's incredibly more professional and sophisticated than it was in the 1980s, and all for the better."

Led by legendary Spanish team manager José Maria Echavarri, Unzué was the lead sport director when the team turned professional in 1984 under the Reynolds banner. The team's first major coups came with Pedro Delgado, who won the 1988 Tour and the 1989 Vuelta a España. In 1990, the Spanish bank Banesto signed on as title sponsor, and the team found its future in a quiet rider just down the road from team headquarters in Pamplona: Miguel Indurain.

Indurain's five consecutive Tour victories from 1991 to 1995 captured the essence of modern Spain that was transitioning out of the stupor that came under four decades of the Franco

THE 2015 SEASON WILL BE A SUCCESS IF...

Nairo Quintana wins the Tour de France.

THE 2015 SEASON WILL BE A FAILURE IF... the team cannot reach the podium at grand tours as well as major classics.



VALVERDE

dictatorship and the rebirth of a nation. The 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, and Indurain's summertime dominance of the Tour, electrified an entire nation.

"It was a magical time with Miguel," Unzué remembered. "It went far beyond cycling. It was as if the entire nation breathed cycling for the month of July. We knew it was something special, something that we will probably never live again."

After that came the hard times. Other Spanish riders tried in vain to fill Indurain's shoes, riders such as Abraham Olano or the tortured soul of José Maria "El Chava" Jiménez. Instead, that void was filled by a Texan named Lance Armstrong.

Unzué's been in the front row of modern Spanish cycling history, through the good and the bad. And he's the first to admit there was plenty of bad. From the Festina Affair in 1998 to Operación Puerto in 2006, the Spanish peloton has been decimated by doping scandals.

Without blatantly saying it, Unzué admitted the entire sport was overwhelmed by a culture of permissiveness that knew no bounds.

"The sport made a lot of mistakes, and we've come into a much better place," Unzué said diplomatically. "Things were out of control, there was an excess that engulfed the sport. Things had to change, and thankfully, they did."

Unzué's fortunes were forever linked to Echaurren, who decided to retire in 2008, giving Unzué full ownership of the team. With Spanish cycling still reeling from the Operación Puerto doping scandal, Unzué fought to stay afloat in the choppy waters. Long accustomed to winning grand tours, Unzué and the team struggled to find a new Indurain. After title sponsor Caisse d'Epargne announced it would not continue its sponsorship beyond the 2010 season, Unzué thought his run was over.

"I seriously thought about walking away in 2010. The sport seemed stuck in a bad place, and I thought it would be a good moment to turn

the page," Unzué said. "Then a few things happened. The sport was making the right changes, and Movistar came along to give us the support we needed to become a great team again."

And something else happened. Late in 2010, when he was negotiating with international telecommunications giant Movistar to take over the title sponsorship, Unzué received a phone call from former nemesis Vicente Belda, who was working with a small Colombian team.

"He said, 'Ojo Eusebio, hay un chaval quien tiene mucha clase,'" Unzué recalled. Check it out, there's a kid with a lot of class. "That was the first time I heard the name Nairo Quintana."

A NEW START WITH NAIRO

Unzué's extended cycling family pedals into the 2015 season at the top of its game. With Movistar's solid financial backing, Unzué has the purse strings to create a world-class infrastructure to compete at the highest level of the sport.

In 2014, Movistar won more than 30 races, its first grand tour with Quintana's Giro since Valverde won the Vuelta in 2009, and captured its second straight WorldTour team prize. Unzué had no reason to be envious.

"I think Sky taught everyone a few lessons in 2011 and 2012. We were among others who had to play a little game of catch-up," Unzué said. "Now every team has changed how they operate. We have more specialists working with the riders. The approach is more modern, more scientific, yet still just as interesting. It's part of the evolution of the sport."

Even more important for Unzué is the arrival of Quintana as a legitimate grand tour contender. Movistar knew they had a diamond-in-the-rough when they signed Quintana in 2012, but even they were caught by surprise by his meteoric rise in his Tour debut in 2013, when he rode to second overall, winning a stage as well as capturing the climber's and best young rider's jerseys en route to South America's best Tour finish.

Perhaps as a testament to Unzué's presence and respect, Quintana eventually accepted the team's somewhat controversial decision to keep him out of the 2014 Tour. Unzué had seen enough in his long career to know that the time was not right for Quintana to take on the full weight of the Tour.

"They would have eaten him alive if we had taken him to the Tour this year," Unzué explained. "Nairo was angry; he wanted to go to the Tour, and I appreciate that. That shows his ambition, but he finally saw our point of view. We told him, 'Nairo, go to the Giro to win, because the Tour will be more complicated in 2014.' And we were right."

Quintana grudgingly admits it as well. He not only took home South America's first pink jersey, but he gained a level of confidence that should pay dividends in the coming years.

"I learned what it took to win a grand tour. It was never easy in the Giro, and we had to overcome a lot. With the team's support, I was able to win this beautiful race," Quintana said. "Now I have that experience that will help me to confront the challenge of the Tour."

For 2015, Unzué will bring both Valverde and Quintana to the Tour, but Valverde will be more of an insurance policy than an outright co-captain, something Valverde readily admitted.

"I am a realist. Nairo has a better chance than



me to win the Tour," Valverde said. "We will both go to the Tour, first to ride for Nairo. If he has some problems, I can be there to help out, but we will go with Nairo as the leader."

Unzué also revealed that Quintana is much more fiery and emotional behind the scenes than he reveals in public, where the young Colombian hides behind a mask of humility and respect.

"He wants to win every race on the calendar, and he wants to do it now," Unzué said. "He is still very young, and like a youngster of his age, he doesn't like to be patient. But make no mistake, he is a huge talent. He is a rider who can mask his age."

Quintana, who recently signed a two-year contract extension with Movistar through 2016, swiftly put Unzué right back on the front lines of the peloton after nearly two decades on its fringe.

"I've been lucky to have had them all — Perico, Miguel, Alejandro — but never Contador. We

could never quite align our interests," Unzué said with a tinge of regret. "Now we have Nairo, who is just starting to truly flower. He can be one of the great ones, and it's our responsibility to do it the right way."

Cyrille Guimard, the legendary French director of Bernard Hinault, Laurent Fignon, and Greg LeMond in the 1980s, is Unzué's only rival when it comes to depth and quality of palmares.

Unzué is cycling's ultimate survivor. Back in the boom days of the 1980s and 1990s, Spain boasted dozens of professional and amateur teams. A devastating economic crisis, coupled with a string of equally devastating doping scandals, has left the Spanish peloton in ruins. Going into 2015, Unzué's Movistar is Spain's only elite team still standing.

And with Quintana, Unzué once again has open road all the way to Paris. No wonder he was all smiles as winter descended on Pamplona.



A Dream FULFILLED

Revamped
MTN-Qhubeka
earns its spot
at the Tour de
France

By Andrew Hood



The vastness and variety of Africa is often lost on anyone who has never set

foot on the world's second-largest continent. It stretches from the Mediterranean Sea to the Cape of Good Hope, and is home to more than 1 billion people. Some 54 nations splay across an awe-inspiring blend of deserts, savannahs, jungles, and mountains that make much of the rest of the world look tame.

With regard to cycling, Africa is truly the sport's final frontier. Although the continent has delivered more than a handful of top pros, and even a Tour de France champion in Kenyan-born Chris Froome, in terms of development, infrastructure, support, and depth, Africa is light years behind the rest of the peloton.

Out of that enormity, a small band of dreamers from South Africa will, on July 4, line up at the start of the Tour de France.

MTN-Qhubeka, which made history in 2014 when it became the first African team to race a grand tour at the Vuelta a España, is raising the bar in dramatic fashion this season. Signing a pack of established WorldTour pros with something to prove, and combining them on a squad with the raw talent of the existing African riders, team principal Douglas Ryder is hoping to break cycling's final barrier.

Receiving an invitation from Tour de France organizers ASO on January 14 was the culmination of an audacious dream that would have seemed all but impossible just a few years ago; an African team, backed by African sponsors and riders, racing at the pinnacle of the sport.

Some will draw comparisons to other groundbreaking moments in cycling history, such as when Greg LeMond became the first non-European to win the Tour in 1986, or when UK-based Team Sky won back-to-back yellow jerseys in 2012 and 2013. Both achievements were considered nearly unimaginable just a few years prior.

The challenges facing Africa are radically different compared to cycling's other pioneers, however. The continent is packed with talent, but the sport is in its nascent stages. As cycling's seasoned elites push the envelope of performance through incremen-

COURTESY MTN-QHUBEKA/ANDREW KING

tal gains and space-age science, the majority of African nations are still struggling to put athletes on bikes, give them proper coaching and nutrition, and introduce them to the basics of racing and tactics.

In much of Africa, it's not a question of having a gluten-free diet or using an SRM, but rather having a bicycle suitable for racing, and enough food to eat to burn through the thousands of calories demanded by a bike race.

To span that chasm, Ryder and general manager Brian Smith have built a team for 2015 that they hope will serve as a bridge between the promise of Africa, and the elite of the European peloton.

"The Tour is the big event in our sport, and that's what we are going for," Smith told *Velo* contributor Gregor Brown. "If you had to only have 25 Africans, it'd be hard to make it into the Tour de France. We are thinking big, but [by racing at the Tour de France], it's going to help the Africans."

From Ryder's base in South Africa, the dream quickly grew into reality. Formed in 2007, the team has steadily grown, earning Africa's first Professional Continental license, before making history at the Vuelta last year.

MTN-Qhubeka won 10 races in 2014, but only one in Europe — a stage with German sprinter Gerald Ciolek at the Ruta del Sol — and scored podiums in other races such as the Tour of Britain, Tour of Denmark, and Tour of Luxembourg. It also saw Sergio Pardilla finish 17th in the Vuelta; all promising and encouraging results, but hardly the caliber of performances that excite Tour organizers.

The team knew that if it wanted a Tour de France invitation it needed Tour de France pedigree riders, which meant a major makeover going into 2015. The arrival of Cérvelo as the bike sponsor helped give the team the extra cash it needed, and Smith became the most active GM on the transfer market going into 2015, signing eight new riders.

Among the big-name arrivals are Tour de France stage winner Tyler Farrar (from Garmin-Sharp), Milano-Sanremo winner Matthew Goss (from Orica-GreenEdge), Edvald Boasson Hagen (from Sky), Theo Bos (from Belkin), Steve Cummings (from BMC Racing), and Serge Pauwels (from Omega Pharma-Quick Step).

Those riders give the team instant credibility, and team officials insist the influx of more European talent doesn't dilute their mission of developing African cycling. Ryder and Smith insist they are only being realistic and pragmatic. The level of racing and experience simply isn't there yet for an all-African squad to compete at the Tour. They realize the best way to nurture homegrown, African talent is to surround them with established pros and support staff that can share their collective knowledge.

"The confidence isn't there yet, but if the

"These guys want to race. I want to give them the freedom to race how they want to. Racing at the Tour de France is going to be huge for African cycling. It will be a landmark event."

— Brian Smith, general manager

Africans can deliver these new guys to victory, that gives them confidence," Smith said. "They will see that these riders are just like them, and the more they get to know them, the more belief and confidence they will have."

The new-look MTN-Qhubeka team fits into the mold of a modern, elite professional team, without losing its unique African feel. At least that's what Ryder is banking on. Last season, 19 of the 27 riders were African. For 2015, the team has trimmed that to 13 African riders on the team's roster; still nearly half. Just rubbing shoulders with established pros like Goss, Farrar, and Boasson Hagen will pay huge dividends for the Africans on the team.

"Team Sky didn't bring a 100-percent British team to the Tour, nor Orica-GreenEdge a 100-percent Australian team," Ryder said. "You have to remember that Africa is a lot further behind those two countries. We want to grow African cycling, and for it to be sustainable, it is important we build the talent first. Our international riders have proven how invaluable experience and mentorship is in cycling. Their involvement in the team has fast-tracked us forward."

ALL ABOARD

The team held a training camp in December, with the new members integrating into the squad. As with anything in Africa, things were a bit different. Not only did the squad do the typical cycling team activities in the challenging hill country near Cape Town, South Africa, but the members went into the bush, meeting with locals, many of whom remain subsistence farmers.

The chance to race with the uniquely African team made the move all the more interesting for Farrar, who saw it as an opportunity to kick-start his career after seven seasons with Slipstream, and a chance to open new horizons in the sport.

"I am pretty pumped for it. It's a cool program, with some neat ideas. We went back and forth on my goals and theirs, and things lined up nicely. It felt like a good move right from the start," Farrar told *Velo*. "It's not a new team, but they're obviously taking a big step up. It's a program that's super ambitious, with a lot of room to grow. I am excited to be a part of this development, helping the younger guys on the team, and helping the African guys who are new to European racing. I've been racing a long time, and I think I can help those guys."

It's that spirit of breaking new ground that motivates everyone inside the organization. The team is also expanding its support staff in 2015, adding new sport directors, mechanics, and *soigneurs* to bolster a more ambitious racing program.

"These guys want to race. I want to give them the freedom to race how they want to," Smith said of the new riders. "Racing at the Tour de France is going to be huge for African cycling. It will be a landmark event."

Team brass is promising that at least two of the nine riders on the Tour squad will be African. First in line would be Daniel Teklehaimanot, the Eritrean climber who has already raced for three seasons in Europe; next would be Natnael Berhane, another Eritrean who rode the past two seasons with Europcar, finishing second in the 2013 Tour of Turkey, and winning the 2014 Tropicale Amissa Bongo in Gabon, beating such riders as Luis León Sánchez and Linus Gerdemann.

The team's backstory may have proven the tipping point when it came time to dole out wildcard invitations. Tour boss Christian Prudhomme, a former TV journalist, loves a good story.

"[MTN's] participation in the Tour will help accelerate the progression of African cycling. The team has reinforced its youngsters with experienced riders to continue its progress," Prudhomme said. "In recent years, people have said of Boasson Hagen that he would dominate world cycling. As for Bos, Farrar, and Goss, they're very good sprinters."

Team Barloworld may have come first, but it was a team that was African in name only. The sponsor was South African, but the team was registered in Ireland, and run by Europeans. MTN-Qhubeka is much more African in look and feel.

"People used to laugh it off when we started working on this project 10 years ago," said Ryder, a former racer who knocked around Europe for a few seasons. "We've slowly gotten people to buy into the idea. Now the riders and staff believe it's possible."

BIKE POWER

Another key component of the team's story is Qhubeka, a charity aimed at helping put Africans on bikes — not to race them, but to give them a means of cheap, reliable transportation, allowing them to get to schools, hospitals, and jobs. The charity is at the core of the team's mis-



sion, and represents the gulf that exists between Africa and the rest of the developed world. In Africa, any bike, no matter how rudimentary, is considered a luxury.

"I want them to understand Qhubeka, which is much bigger than racing a bike," Smith said. "We are racing bikes for people who are planting trees or collecting bottles, just to have a bike to use for living. That's a strong message... The team is different, and the Qhubeka foundation makes a difference, that's why I took the job on. When I stood in front of them at the team camp in South Africa, I told them that I'd help them reach their goal.

"The Tour de France invitation ... It's emotional. I shed tears realizing that this team is coming along."

If MTN-Qhubeka manages to win a stage at the Tour, it could well be one of those moments that changes everything. Everyone working in cycling in Africa knows the talent is there — just look at the quality of the continent's long-distance runners — but building a cycling tradition doesn't happen overnight.

The sport is starting to take root across the continent. Jock Boyer, who was the first American to race the Tour in 1981, has done tremendous work developing the sport in Rwanda. The UCI-backed World Cycling Centre Africa, based

THE 2015 SEASON WILL BE A SUCCESS IF...
MTN-Qhubeka can win a stage at the Tour de France.

THE 2015 SEASON WILL BE A FAILURE IF...
they fail to notch at least a few major wins.

in South Africa, provides coaching and stipends to athletes from across the continent, with the top riders earning trips to the UCI's World Cycling Centre in Switzerland. War-torn Eritrea is a hotspot for cycling, thanks in part to its Italian colonial roots.

"These young Eritrean riders are the grandchildren of Coppi and Bartali," said Prudhomme, referring to legendary Italians Fausto Coppi and Gino Bartali, and to the more than 50 years of Italian occupation of the country that ended during World War II.

South Africa, where the sport is most developed, has delivered such talent as Robbie Hunter, Daryl Impey, and, of course, 2013 Tour winner Froome, who raced in South Africa as a teenager. Riders such as Dan Craven, from Namibia, have fought their way into the top level, joining Europcar in 2014.




"The advances in the past decade are startling. Things have come so far since I did my first African championships in 2005 to today. There is an African wave coming," Craven told *Velo*. "Despite the problems, the corruption, the barriers, the desire is there. There is a groundswell that continues to grow. It's at a tipping point."

Over the past four decades, the Tour de France has slowly opened its doors to the world. First, it was the British, then the Americans and Australians, followed by the Colombians. In 2014, Ji Cheng (Giant-Shimano) became the first Chinese rider to start the Tour. This season could very well be the year of the Africans.

"I am convinced the cycling world will look very different in 10 years' time," Ryder said. "The Americans had their time, and now the Brits are having theirs. Africa is coming."

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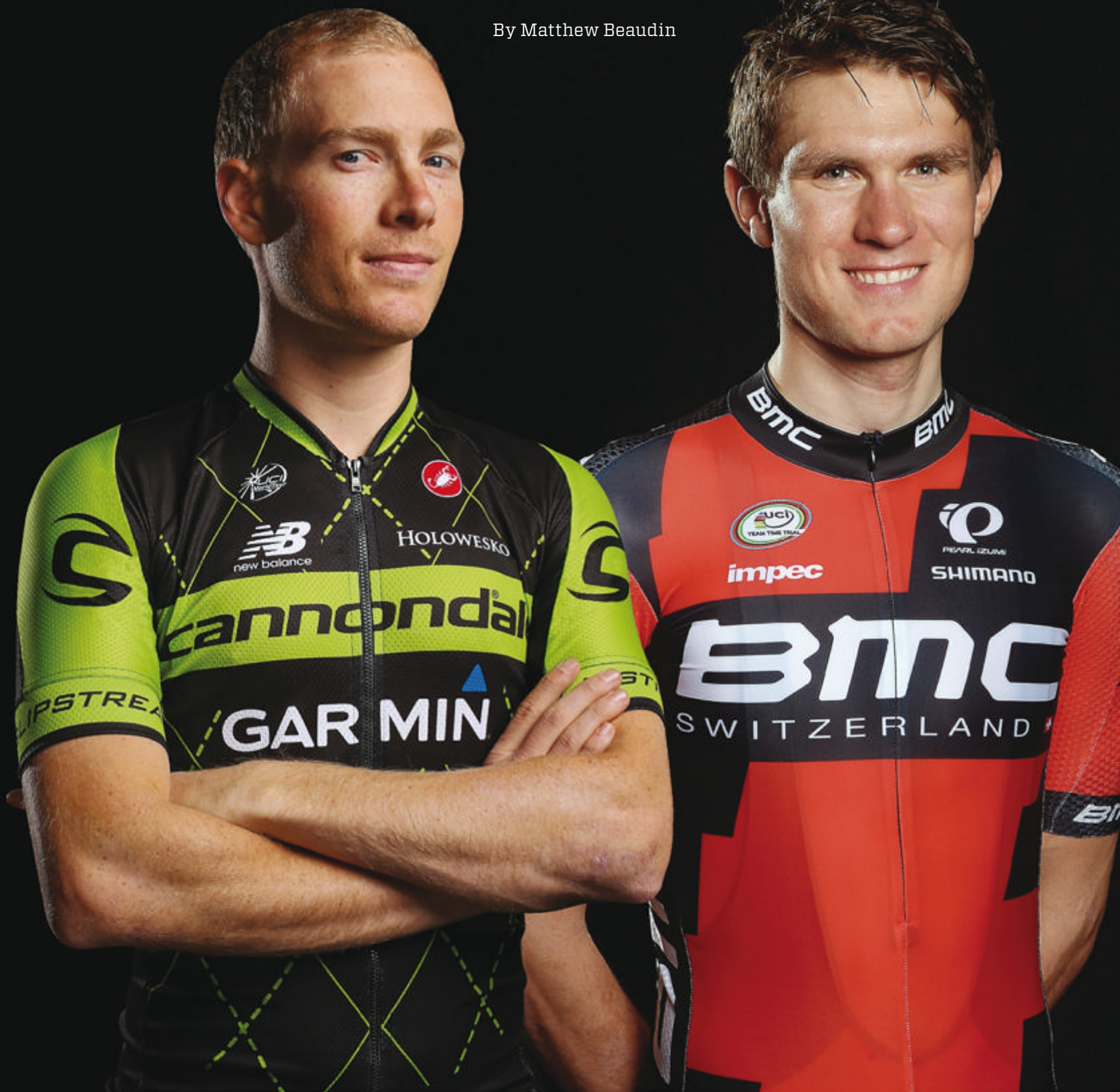
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The TWO AMERICANS

Talansky and Tejay's course for collision

By Matthew Beaudin



Neither man would tell you straight up. They'd play it down, pretend it wasn't there at all. And maybe the full-blown rivalry isn't here — at least not yet.

But for Andrew Talansky and Tejay van Garderen, it's coming. It has to. The two are similarly aged American stars in a sports culture and media that gorges itself on drama.

The two are comparably talented contemporaries and have been tracing athletic arcs that will further intersect for years, on Tour de France climbs and Colorado dirt roads.

Rivalries are born through competition and heritage, media pot-stirring, and outright disdain. It doesn't take all the ingredients, but only a few. Rivalries can define careers — think Magic Johnson versus Larry Bird, the Boston Red Sox versus the New York Yankees, or Mohammed Ali versus Joe Frazier.

So what of this, men?

"It's not Tejay who I have to worry about. It's Chris Froome, it's Vincenzo Nibali, it's Alberto Contador, it's Joaquim Rodríguez. There's a laundry list of people," Talansky has told *Velo* in the past. "It's not, 'Oh, I just want to be better than the next American.' It's, 'I'd like to be the best of everybody out there.' And when you look at it that way, Tejay just kind of falls into however he's riding in a given race."

Van Garderen has been quiet on the subject as well.

"I get along well with [Talansky], I am happy to see other Americans do well — I think we complement each other. He raises the bar for me, and I raise the bar for him. We're competitive, but it's healthy ... it means our sport is getting stronger," van Garderen told *Velo*. "I still think Joe Dombrowski (Cannondale-Garmin) has a lot of potential, we haven't seen the best of him, now that he's over his injuries; I think we can see a big year from him. And I am curious to see what

Joey Rosskopf (BMC Racing) is going to do."

Not exactly fighting words.

As far as real-world drama, there is but one instance that comes to mind between the two, and it involves Talansky yelling in the general direction of the BMC Racing bus, at the 2013 USA Pro Cycling Challenge.

Erroneous reporting of the results from the Vail Pass time trial led to a confrontation between runner-up Talansky (Garmin-Sharp) and BMC team staff; due to an apparent misunderstanding in the broadcast booth, Talansky was identified as the day's winner for a short time, even after van Garderen had clocked in at 25:01. Talansky's time was four seconds slower.

Though the mistake was corrected, it triggered what several described as a profanity-laced tirade directed at BMC staff, including Kate Ochowicz-Hogan, daughter of team manager Jim Ochowicz.

"I was sitting there watching with some friends and following the results on my phone," said Ochowicz-Hogan, BMC's marketing director. "Talansky came [off the bus] sort of raving and waving his arms around, cursing and accusing our team of some wrongdoings [related to race timing]."

That instance aside, the public moments between the two have been comparable to most other riders, it seems.

COUNTERBALANCE IS KEY

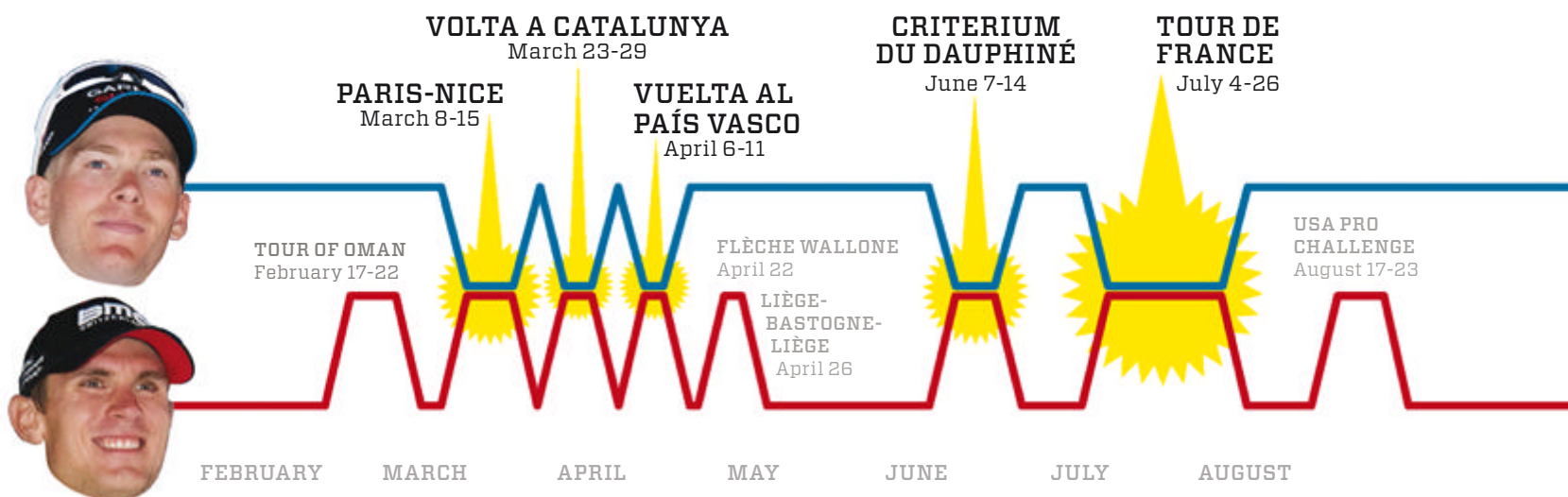
Talansky has two major wins to his name. He won the 2012 Tour de l'Ain, as well as the 2014 Critérium du Dauphiné, which he brilliantly stole from Alberto Contador on a final-stage breakaway. Talansky has two grand tour top 10s to his credit as well: 10th at the 2013 Tour de France, and seventh at the 2012 Vuelta a España.

Van Garderen's palmares is a bit longer. He won the 2013

SAME COUNTRY, SIMILIAR GOALS, SIMILAR STRENGTHS

Talansky was the surprise winner at the 2014 Dauphiné, while van Garderen went on to finish fifth at the Tour de France.





COLLISION COURSE? Talansky and van Garderen have very similar 2015 race schedules, and will compete at four stage races before the Tour de France in July.

Amgen Tour of California and the USA Pro Cycling Challenge in Colorado, now two years running. He's finished fifth at the Tour de France twice, and won a white jersey as its best young rider in 2012. Still, he lacks, for now, that European stage race win — something Talansky has done twice.

Coincidentally, both men have finished second overall at the prestigious Tour de l'Avenir — van Garderen in 2009, behind Romain Sicard, and Talansky in 2010, behind Nairo Quintana.

"In terms of the competitive side of each of them and where they're headed, they're both heading in similar directions," BMC Racing president Jim Ochowicz told *Velo*. "They're both on two good teams with a lot of support, and have been given leadership positions, here and there. They are still very much in the learning curve. Where they end up in a year or two, three, four, I don't know. But I know that Tejay will be up there. And I don't work with Talansky so I can't give you personal opinions. I know he's a great athlete, a good competitor, on a good team."

Talansky's manager at Cannondale-Garmin, Jonathan Vaughters, said much of the same.

"At some point in time, might be [in 2015], might be three years, it might be a Tour de France, or maybe [Colorado], who knows what race, where it's just going to be this nasty drag-out, punch-down. It'll happen. It'll eventually happen. There's no doubt in my mind. Those two guys at some point, some race, those guys are going to hit a huge rivalry," he said. "I think that would actually draw a lot of new fans into the sport. And just reinvigorate people's passion. Maybe people who are a little burnt on the Lance thing, or whatever. That would really draw them back into something

cool... we haven't seen it quite boil up yet."

Vaughters, though, likes his guy in a cage fight. "Andrew would kill him. But that's because Andrew would, like, bite his ear off. Tear his fucking nuts off. Andrew — yeah."

How rivalries affect different athletes varies. Some are pushed to greater performance, while others may suffer from a sort of tunnel vision; beat the rival, but suffer in the long game. Think about Alejandro Valverde (Movistar) and Joaquim Rodríguez (Katusha) at the 2013 world road championships, or at the 2014 Vuelta a España. How many times did they attack one another in the Vuelta, only to lose time to Alberto Contador and Chris Froome by failing to work together?

A 2010 paper entitled "The Psychology of Rivalry," by Gavin Kilduff, pointed out that sometimes actors in a rivalry are more likely to take risks than those without the pressure of increased competition. "In other words, in the language of social value orientation work, rivalry should lead to more competitive orientations — in which relative gains are favored over absolute gains," he wrote.

The effect on competition can be negligible. There is no denying the fact that rivalries, however, are just plain fun. "Frazier is so ugly that he should donate his face to the U.S. Bureau of Wildlife," Muhammad Ali once said. Larry Bird said the first thing he'd do each morning was check box scores to see what Magic Johnson had done the night prior.

American cycling, at least lately, hasn't seen anything close to a full-blown rivalry. Lance Armstrong seemed to be rivals with everyone; Greg LeMond had his greatest rival on his own team in Frenchman Bernard Hinault. American cycling actually needs this.

"For all the teams and public and so on, I

think any country that has two riders of the same generation going for the same races always makes for interesting stories and interesting races," Cannondale-Garmin director Charly Wegelius told *Velo*. "I think it's pretty personal on the riders. A lot of those guys, maybe they raced against each other in the junior races and so on, and there can be a lot of history to it. In Europe, especially in Italy, they love it. They go out of their way to create a polémica. And so long as it's done respectfully, I think it's great for the sport."

A key ingredient in a rivalry is the differences between the parties. In the Red Sox-Yankees, the general unkemptness of the Boston squad contrasts beautifully with the clean-shaven and trimmed Yankees. Counterbalance is key.

"Someone asked me that last year, about the differences between them; Tejay has got the motor and talent; and not that Talansky doesn't, but Talansky has that raw determination, that's why he has been called the 'pit bull'; when he sets his sights on something, he won't let go," said Peter Stetina, van Garderen's BMC teammate and longtime friend.

For the U.S. fans of the sport, the fact that these two are part of the larger discussion means the sport is in good shape in the States.

"Americans are fortunate to have two legitimate GC contenders to lead the sport into this next generation ... they are similar in a lot of ways, but they are also uniquely their own person," BMC's Brent Bookwalter said. "But when you see them in the heat of the moment, each of them turn into trained killers, they both want to succeed, but each has their own ways to get there."

Indeed, they do. And each man's way is through the other.

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10 THINGS

to watch in 2015



PHOTO CREDIT



MULTIPLE ATTEMPTS ON THE HOUR RECORD

The UCI's decision last year to relax its long-standing hour-record equipment restrictions have rejuvenated one of the sport's hallowed titles. In 2014, we saw Jens Voigt break the record, followed quickly by Swiss rider Matthias Brändle. By the time you're reading this, the new Hour Record holder will likely be an Australian — either Jack Bobridge, who is attempting the record in Melbourne on January 31, or Rohan Dennis, who will make an attempt in Grenchen, Switzerland, on February 8. Alex Dowsett planned to give it a go in London in late February but, after breaking his collarbone in January, his plans became less clear. Dutchman Thomas Dekker is also giving it a go, in Mexico City, in late February. Bradley Wiggins' attempt is provisionally penciled in for the end of June. Wiggins will almost certainly smash whatever record is set before him, likely drawing in former world TT champions Fabian Cancellara and Tony Martin. Watching a cyclist ride in circles for an hour has never been so exciting.

ASTANA'S WORLDTOUR STATUS

When the UCI granted Astana its 2015 WorldTour license in December, the federation did so reluctantly — and with caveats. The team is on probation, and any further revelations of doping, either past or present, could well see the squad of Tour de France champion Vincenzo Nibali lose its spot in the sport's biggest events. With Italian investigators yet to turn their Padova case file over to the UCI — which, reportedly incriminates several Astana riders — and with the UCI's CIRC investigation set to wrap up in February, there's ample opportunity for the Kazakhstani team to lose its license. And though that would mean a demotion to Pro Continental status, where the possibility of wildcard invitations to major events still exists, the list of infractions would also be in violation of terms for the voluntary group the Mouvement Pour un Cyclisme Crédible (MPCC). The sport's top race promoters have agreed to first grant wildcard invites to those teams in good standing with MPCC, meaning the house of cards could come falling down around Astana.

THE CIRC ANNOUNCEMENT

With an expected completion date of late February, the UCI's Cycling Independent Reform Commission (CIRC) could well have significant impact on the pro peloton in 2015. Asking anyone involved in the sport to come forward with knowledge of doping that has taken place since 1998, and promising sanctions for those who do not, this is the UCI's attempt to clear the slate on what took place in the past. It's unclear what the commission will recommend. Will names be revealed? Will it include salacious details that made USADA's report on Lance Armstrong and the U.S. Postal Service team so compelling? Or will it simply paint a broad stroke and focus on remedies rather than casting blame? Armstrong has stated that he spoke with the panel. Danish web site Feltet.dk has stated that sources close to the investigation believe that Tinkoff-Saxo team manager Bjarne Riis “will not have a future in cycling” once the report is published.

Cookson said in an interview with VeloNews.com that the effort would pay dividends, and that the CIRC findings could serve as a lever to push unrepentant riders and staffers out of the sport for good. “All of the information that comes out of that will be helpful going forward. We need to have a mechanism that can look at the sport and decide who can stay in the sport and who needs to be thrown out,” Cookson told VeloNews.com. “And when we have that mechanism, it needs to be robust and sustainable in court. I can guarantee that if we excluded someone from their main source of income, that they'll challenge it. So we need to make sure that what we do is truly defensible.”

MAJOR EVENTS ADDING WOMEN'S RACES

World road champion Pauline Ferrand-Prévot, living legend Marianne Vos, and the rest of the women's pro peloton will converge on North American soil several times during the 2015 season, as major events are either adding women's races or upgrading their UCI ranking. Domestically, the Amgen Tour of California, USA Pro Challenge, and Tour of Utah are each holding women's events in conjunction with their UCI stage races. (Abroad, La Course, the one-day race held in Paris on the final day of the Tour de France, will return; however, a planned event in conjunction of the Vuelta a España may ultimately be cancelled.) The long-running one-day race in Philadelphia, twice won by American Evelyn Stevens, returns in 2015 as part of the women's UCI World Cup. Add in the world road championships in Richmond, and the best riders of the women's peloton could end up spending a good chunk of their season in the U.S.

CONTADOR'S GIRO-TOUR DOUBLE

You can be forgiven if the thought of a GC contender winning the Giro d'Italia and Tour de France in the same season gives you pause for concern. The last man to do it was Marco Pantani, in 1998, during the heyday of the EPO era. Yet Spaniard Alberto Contador has stated that he will attempt to win both races in 2015. A multi-time winner of all three of the sport's grand tours — though he was stripped of his second Giro victory, in 2011, due to a drug suspension — Contador, 32, is showing no signs of slowing down. Contador will be the pre-race favorite at the Giro in May, up against contenders like Rigoberto Urán and Fabio Aru. In France in July, Contador will need to beat Chris Froome, Nairo Quintana, and Vincenzo Nibali, all whom should be fresh. The odds aren't in his favor to win them both, but as he showed with his Vuelta victory in September, coming off a tibia fracture at the Tour, Contador is often capable of pulling off the unimaginable.



TAYLOR PHINNEY'S RETURN

The question surrounding Phinney's comeback from a devastating injury last May is not "will he, or won't he?" — the national TT champion has been back on the bike for months now, and will return to racing this spring. Rather, the question is "how much strength can he regain — and how quickly?" Horrific scars hint at the damage of a compound leg fracture and, even worse, a severed patella tendon; it's the kind of injury that takes years to recover from. Even at 95 percent, Phinney, one of the most promising riders of his generation, would be capable of keeping up with the pro peloton. But he isn't paid to simply ride in the bunch, and furthermore, he wouldn't be content with it. At 24, he's a former world pursuit champion, a two-time Olympian, and a two-time national TT champion, with eyes on classics like Milano-Sanremo, the Tour of Flanders, and Paris-Roubaix. Those races will likely come a bit early for him this year, but if Phinney can reach the podium of a major time trial by season's end, that should be a sign that he's back on track.

RICHMOND WORLDS

All eyes will be on the United States from September 19 through 27, as Richmond, Virginia, plays host to the UCI world road championships, the first time the U.S. has hosted the event since it was in Colorado Springs in 1986. The road course is fast — not flat, but not hilly — with some tricky sections through the city and a tough cobbled climb close to the finish line. It's not likely a day for the pure climbers or the pure sprinters; instead, expect the stars of the one-day classics — Sagan, Degenkolb, Gilbert, Valverde, Gerrans — to battle for the rainbow jersey. The TT course is more straightforward — long, flat, and fast — and will favor those with the largest engine. Regardless of the winners, for a week in September, the best riders in the sport will be fighting for the rainbow jersey on U.S. soil.

TIM DE WAELE (2)

SPRINT RIVALRIES

In a discipline that rewards courage, team strength, and, above all, raw, unadulterated speed, it's not uncommon that a new sprinter emerges every few years to take the honors as the sport's fastest man. In 2014, it was Marcel Kittel, who in 2013 brought an end to Mark Cavendish's five-year reign. Before Cavendish it was Alessandro Petacchi; before that it was Robbie McEwen; before that it was Mario Cipollini. What is uncommon in 2015 is how long the list of sprinters who are capable of winning on any given day has grown. Kittel (Giant-Alpecin) and Cavendish (Etixx-Quick-Step) are still the big favorites, but just behind them are German Andre Greipel (Lotto-Soudal), and Frenchmen Nacer Bouhanni (Cofidis), Arnaud Démare (FDJ.fr), and Bryan Coquard (Europcar). The MTN-Qhubeka squad has a roster full of B-list sprinters, such as Matthew Goss, Tyler Farrar, Edvald Boasson Hagen, and Theo Bos, which should keep the sprint trains on their toes. And while they're not pure sprinters, strongmen Alexander Kristoff (Katusha), Peter Sagan (Tinkoff-Saxo), and John Degenkolb (Giant-Alpecin) are also fully capable of crossing the finish line first.

KRISTIN ARMSTRONG'S COMEBACK

When American Kristin Armstrong returned from retirement in 2012, at age 39, to win a second Olympic gold medal, she established herself as the undisputed queen of the time trial. After two years of a second retirement, speculation of her quest for a third gold medal, at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, appears to have solid footing. Asked point blank in September if she would be coming back to race with her former team — named, appropriately, Twenty16 — Armstrong would neither confirm nor deny the rumor. Asked again in January, she said she had no news. Should she mount a comeback, Armstrong's biggest rival would likely be Father Time; she will turn 43 on August 11, 2016, one day after the Olympic TT in Rio. Look for Armstrong to try to earn a spot on the national team for the world championships in Richmond, Virginia. From there, it's anyone's guess.

ROMAN KREUZIGER'S BIO-PASSPORT CASE

Doping within the peloton has been greatly reduced since 2008, not necessarily due to a sea change within the mentality of professional athletes, but because of the UCI's biological passport program. The bio-passport looks not only for banned substances but also for abnormalities in blood values detected through long-term testing, particularly when those abnormalities occur in conjunction with surprising performances. During the 2011 and 2012 seasons, while riding for Astana, Czech rider Roman Kreuziger delivered blood profiles that triggered the UCI's computerized Athlete Passport Management Unit (APMU) software; he was notified of a provisional suspension in June 2014, just prior to the Tour de France. A member of Tinkoff-Saxo since 2013, and with the backing of wealthy team boss Oleg Tinkov, Kreuziger may be the first rider to truly have the resources to contest the bio-passport system; he is appealing his suspension to the Court of Arbitration For Sport (CAS), with no date yet announced for a hearing. If Kreuziger is able to convince CAS of his innocence, it would throw the entire bio-passport system into doubt, potentially prompting lawsuits from those riders that have already been suspended, and perhaps forcing the entire peloton to reevaluate its fear of the most comprehensive anti-doping system that currently exists.

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Classics COUNTRY

The spring classics span the course of eight weeks, offer up a range of terrains from bergs to troughs, and bring a glut of drama like no other season.

By Chris Case

There are the cobblestones and the pavé — blocks of rock that make riding a bike over them seem like a ludicrous proposition, until you see the pros glide across their crowns at speed. Then, it simply elicits awe.

Then there are the bergs and côtes of the Ardennes — a climber's paradise. Up and down for countless farmland miles, on course profiles that resemble a serrated blade, often with a punch-to-the-gut final ascent that brings the race to a mighty climax.

Over two months, from Omloop Het Nieuwsblad to Liège-Bastogne-Liège, the spring classics transform from races famous for their gritty, chaotic façades, to those punctuated by their relentless ascents. Without fail, they prove to be some of the most absorbing competitions of the year.

Here are five things you won't want to miss this spring:

1 IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT.

The Ronde van Vlaanderen (Tour of Flanders) won't change much, and that's a good thing. The closing 150 kilometers will be the same as the 2014 race, which saw the culling of long, flat sections in the final 100 kilometers. The race won't go more than 12 kilometers in the final 150km without a cobbled section or climb, making for tense racing in the closing hours.

De Ronde will again roll out of the stunning city of Bruges, and hit the finish town of Oudenaarde for the first time after 100km. Two hills have been added for 2015 — the Tiegemberg is new to the race and will be the first climb, and Berendries, back after two years' absence, is the eighth crest.

The main attraction will be the infamous Koppenberg, which is the beginning of the crux of the race. The short, narrow, steep climb is more about the struggle for position than anything, as a stressed peloton



TIM DE WAELE

squeezes down and begins to think about selection. From there, it's 45km to the finish, with the Oude Kwaremont and Paterberg combo at the likely center of the winning move. The field will hit the Kwaremont three times and the Paterberg twice, in total.

Last year, Fabian Cancellara won a harsh race blasted with wind and peppered with crashes in the final 100 kilometers. It helped him keep alive his streak of 12 consecutive podiums at the sport's Monuments. Can he do it again, to make it four Flanders wins — tying the record? He'll face the utmost pressure from the usual suspects, including the ever-consistent Greg Van Avermaet (BMC Racing), Sep Vanmarcke (Lotto NL-Jumbo), Tom Boonen (Etixx-Quick-Step), John Degenkolb (Giant-Alpecin), and Peter Sagan (Tinkoff-Saxo), among a handful of others.

2 WATCH FABIAN CANCELLARA TAKE ANOTHER CRACK AT THE SPRING CLASSICS.

After what he described as a season full of “ups and downs,” the veteran Swiss rider hopes to improve upon what would be a stellar classics campaign for nearly anyone else. For the first time in four years, his team's manager and sponsor stay the same, a welcome respite from the tumult that hampered the Leopard-RadioShack-Nissan-Trek squads in previous seasons. The addition of Belgian classics veteran Gert Steegmans, who comes over from Omega Pharma-Quick Step, is another positive.

Cancellara, 33, was once again a force to be reckoned with at the classics last season, winning the Ronde van Vlaanderen and notching podiums at Milano-Sanremo (second) and Paris-Roubaix (third). He has indicated that he will retire at the end of the 2016 season, meaning fans will have limited opportunities to witness the ferocity of his attacks over the cobbles of northern Europe.

“It doesn't make me scared, more it makes me think,” Cancellara said of his looming retirement. “I just want to enjoy every moment. What I won, I have, and nobody can take that away. I don't feel any pressure.”

The career of one of the greats has reached its twilight years. But without pressure, the Swiss Time Machine could go back to the future and do it all over again, one more time.

3 THE CHAMELEON RETURNS FOR ONE MORE SHOT AT IMMORTALITY.

Yes, Brad Wiggins is ready to head back to his roots, on the track, in preparation for a run at gold at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. But first, he has a date with pavé.

On April 12, the world and Olympic TT champion will attempt one last road race, perhaps the hardest of them all, across the north of France, hoping to go even better than he did last year when he garnered ninth place at Paris-Roubaix.

“Paris-Roubaix is a special race for me and I'm determined to give it another go in Team Sky colors,” Wiggins said. “It's one of the toughest races in the calendar and my aim is to improve on my ninth-place finish. After that, I can focus fully on preparing for the Rio Olympics in 2016.”

4 WE'RE ALL WAITING, PETER.

Perhaps undue, Peter Sagan faces the epitome of performance pressure in 2015. The still-young Slovenian, who turned 25 in January, begins a new chapter this season when he will suit up in a different jersey for the first time since turning pro in 2010 with Liquigas-Cannondale.

The Tinkoff-Saxo star has emphatically stated that a “big win” is the top priority in his move. “The objective will be the classics. For me, the most important will be Sanremo, Flanders, and Roubaix. After that, we'll see what the team wants,” Sagan said. He will look to new coach Bobby Julich to help him deliver that win.

But can Julich do what others haven't been able to? It will be interesting to see how the former GC rider will translate his experiences in the pro peloton, which ended in 2008, into success for the young rider with classics ambitions and all the talent in the world.

Equally exciting will be waiting to see whether the move, and the heaps of money that came with it, can finally propel Sagan to victory.





5 PHILIPPE GILBERT (BMC RACING) IS STICKING TO WHAT HE KNOWS BEST. The Belgian will steer clear of the cobblestones in 2015, despite rumors that the former world champion was poised to tackle the northern classics, where he's twice finished third at De Ronde. Gilbert will instead return to his roots, the Ardennes, and some unsettled business with Milano-Sanremo — where he's also twice finished third. The cobbles can wait.

"I said I would like to go back to the pavé before I retire, but not in 2015. I am not finishing my career next year," Gilbert said. "My best choices now are doing the explosive races, like Lombardia, Sanremo, and Liège.

"My dream is to win Liège another time, but I will always do better at Amstel Gold Race. I love the Cauberg. It's my favorite climb in the world," Gilbert said of the finishing climb at Amstel Gold. "If the finish was still in Maastricht, I would have never won it. You can take the Cauberg with the big ring, with big power, and high speed. It's perfect for my characteristics."

Now 32, Gilbert is also looking anxiously to the return of the classic course at Milano-Sanremo. Organizers removed the climb up La Maniè last year, and, despite talk of adding the Pompeiana climb, moved the finish line back to the Via Roma, in what's a return to the traditional course for the first time since 2007.

"I would like to do well in Sanremo, now that they've 'fixed' the parcours to the one I like the most," he said. "It's a better race when we go faster. When there were more climbs, everyone was waiting. A faster race is harder. And without the La Maniè, it's harder because the group really has to chase to bring back the breakaway."

'15

the GRAND STAND

Le Tour. Il Giro. La Vuelta.

Each name evokes ageless images of cycling passion and performance. For 2015, the three grand tours will not disappoint.

By Chris Case



By May, you've waited a long time for this. The season's first grand tour, the Giro d'Italia, always seems to offer that fascinating blend of drama, controversy, staggering performance and breathtaking vista, all wrapped in a pretty pink package. The first grand tour of the year can't come soon enough for aficionados of the sport.

The 98th Giro d'Italia route was unveiled in early October, and according to organizer RCS Sport, the philosophy behind the race route was one of balance, with fewer transfers and an approach "geared up for modern cycling."

The race kicks off in Riviera dei Fiori in Liguria on May 9, finishing in Milan on May 31. Along the way, there will be a team time trial, one long individual time trial — a rarity for the Italian race — seven flat stages, eight medium-mountain stages, and four high-mountain stages. The iconic Alpine stages have come to define the Italian masterpiece.

The names of the climbs featured this year, as they do every year, dance on your tongue: Mortirolo, Cervinia, and Colle delle Finestre, all in the final week of racing. Summit finishes at Abetone, Aprica, Cervinia, and Sestriere, in addition to Madonna di Campiglio. Legends, all of them. And whoever conquers them, a legend himself.



The 98th Giro d'Italia by the numbers

1 National border crossing (Switzerland)

Medium-mountain stages **8**

1,854

Altitude, in meters, of the Mortirolo, the Montagna Pantani in the 2015 Giro

263 **KM**

Kilometers in the longest stage

2,178

Altitude, in meters, of the Colle delle Finestre, the Cima Coppi in the 2015 Giro

76.8

Kilometers of time trials (17.6km Riviera dei Fiori team time trial; 59.2km individual time trial from Treviso to Valdobbiadene)

29 Overall Giro d'Italia wins by non-Italians



3,481.8

Total length of the Giro, in kilometers

SEVEN
Sprint stages

136

Length of the two shortest road stages, in kilometers

FOUR
High-mountain stages

68



Overall Giro d'Italia wins by Italians

7 Uphill finishes [Abetone, Campitello Matese, Vicenza (Monte Berico), Madonna di Campiglio, Aprica, Cervinia, Sestriere]

43,000

Vertical meters climbed during the 2015 Giro

2 
Rest days (May 18 and May 25)

'15

HIGH JULY





Key stages of the 2015 TOUR DE FRANCE

STAGE 2: Utrecht to Zeeland, 166km

This is one of two stages where the weather could play a decisive role in determining the outcome, not just of the stage, but the entire Tour. Along with the sixth stage from Abbeville to Le Havre, in which there will be 100km of racing along the cliffs of Normandy, this stage across the Zeeland Delta in the Netherlands is at severe risk of high winds. The favorites will need to be on high alert.

STAGE 4: Seraing to Cambrai, 221km

At the 2014 Tour, we saw what cobbles can do on a stage, as Vincenzo Nibali laid down a stunning performance, taking more than two minutes out of his major rivals. Watch for the contenders to try and stick to Nibali's rear wheel.

STAGE 10: Tarbes to La Pierre Saint-Martin, 167km

The first day in the Pyrenees will be crucial, not just because the final 15.3km climb has an average gradient of 7.4 percent. Though not the hardest climb, nor the toughest stage on paper, this testing mountain stage comes after a rest day and is the first mountaintop finish. Those two factors could catch out riders whose bodies have yet to adapt to the intensity of the high mountains.

STAGE 20: Modane to Alpe d'Huez, 110km

The penultimate stage of the Tour is tailor-made for attacks and explosions. At 110km, it is short for a mountain stage, especially considering it includes three brutal climbs; it will be a battle between the contenders from the start. The Col du Telegraphe is 11.9km long at an average gradient of 7.1 percent, followed by the highest point of the 2015 edition, the Col du Galibier — 17.7km at 6.9 percent. Then, the crown jewel, the climb that has become synonymous with the Tour: Alpe d'Huez. Its 21 hairpins and 13.8-kilometer, 8.1 percent average gradient ensure that this edition of the Tour won't be settled until the last switchback.

Golden rows of sundrenched flowers. Searing black tarmac, snaking high into the lush gardens of Alpine summer. Rabid fans, the parting sea of which makes your heart beat quicker than even the ferocity of the sprint finales.

These are the images of France in July. It's Tour time. There is no other circus of sweat and heat and carbon fiber like it on earth. After more than 100 years, the challenge is making the next edition of the world's most famous race a unique experience, for racer and fan alike. ASO always gives it a try.

For the first time in Tour history, the legendary Alpe d'Huez will be climbed on the penultimate stage before the final procession in Paris.

After the captivating stage 5 over the slickened cobbles in 2014 — in which defending champion Chris Froome (Sky) crashed out with a broken hand and wrist, and Vincenzo Nibali (Astana) displayed a deftness rarely seen in a grand tour contender — the cobbles return for a second consecutive year.

Perhaps the biggest surprise is the lack of time trial kilometers, in the one grand tour that seemed to utilize them to their dramatic best.

It will be a showdown, with one of the best matchups in recent memory vying for the golden tunic. Contador vs. Froome vs. Nibali vs. Quintana.

The 2015 Tour began the moment Marcel Kittel crossed the line in Paris in late July.

"This year, the recovery from all these efforts will be very important. The last week in the Alps will be very complicated in case you have to defend the lead, although they give many tactical possibilities in case you have to attack," Contador (Tinkoff-Saxo) said at the route announcement in Paris in October. "In general,

this is a Tour that will require fresh legs at the end, but also you need to start in good shape, because it is very demanding at first."

Simple: Come with good form, and keep it for three grueling weeks.

Can Nibali crush the cobbles again? The Italian excelled last year, finishing third on that stage. He will undoubtedly look forward to stage 4 in 2015, the longest of the race at 221km, in which there will be seven cobbled sections totaling 13.3km — with six of those coming in the final 45km.

"The alchemy of the Tour is to use every possible terrain," said Prudhomme of the perilous cobbles.

The day before that, the third stage will also play homage to another one-day classic, La Flèche Wallonne, with a finish on the brutally steep Mur de Huy.

Less interesting perhaps, but just as important as any stage profile, is the return of bonus seconds for the top three finishers — for the first time since 2007 — aimed at animating the early part of the race, according to Prudhomme.

Three days in the Pyrenees and four in the Alps, including five summit finishes in total, await the peloton.

"Four consecutive stages in the Alps; that hasn't happened for a long time," said Prudhomme, who hopes that the penultimate stage up Alpe d'Huez, having earlier scaled the mighty Col du Galibier, at 2,645 meters, will keep the maillot jaune in play right to the end.

'15

the SPANISH STAGE



TIM DE WAELE (2)

Since the Amaury Sport Organisation (ASO) took over the Vuelta a España in 2008, the Spanish tour has enjoyed a renaissance. And in 2015, the 70th edition of the Vuelta will yet again live up to its billing as a climber's paradise.

"We have our own personality," said Vuelta director Javier Guillén. "Explosive finals, shorter stages, new climbs, original stage starts. We have an important identity as a race."

There will be no less than five summit finishes in the opening nine days of racing, forcing GC riders and stage hunters alike to be on their toes from the gun. A hard mountain stage across Andorra in stage 11, followed by three consecutive climbing stages across the rugged mountains of northern Spain in stages 14, 15, and 16 should prove decisive.

"The stage 11 in Andorra is rough. It has no rest. It's not long but the climbs will be terrible. It will go up and down all day," Nairo Quintana told Spanish website Biciclismo, after the route presentation in January. "Then come the stages in the north. I climbed the Fuente del Chivo in the Circuito Montañes, although it has been six years so I don't remember much. It will be a stage to take care, with demanding terrain. Later we will go through the summit finish of Sotres and finally the Ermita del Alba stage with very broken terrain and two very important final climbs."

The race opens August 22 along Spain's

Costa del Sol with a team time trial in Marbella near Puerto Banús, the haunt of Europe's filthy rich, and will trace across sunny Andalucía for the opening week. A few transition stages through Murcia and Valencia bring the Vuelta to its first rest day, on September 1, in Andorra. Heat will certainly be a factor in the first half of the race.

The course then skips across northern Spain before three decisive stages in Asturias, with the second rest day at Burgos on September 8, a day ahead of a 39km time trial on stage 17. The race concludes with three transition stages, including one hard, mountainous penultimate stage on the outskirts of Madrid in Cercedilla, before the traditional parade through the boulevards of the capital on the final Sunday.

Last year's winner, Alberto Contador, is unlikely to try and defend his title as the Spaniard has prioritized the Giro d'Italia and Tour de France in 2015, while Sky's Chris Froome has yet to commit to the race after his second-place finish in 2014. Therefore, Movistar teammates Alejandro Valverde and Quintana are among the favorites to battle for the general classification, along with Katusha's Joaquim Rodríguez.

9 key stages of the 2015 Vuelta a España

SATURDAY, AUGUST 22ND

STAGE 1

7.4km: Puerto Banús to Marbella
(team time trial)



SUNDAY, AUGUST 23RD

STAGE 2

165km: Alhaurín de la Torre to
Caminito del Rey (first summit finish)



TUESDAY, AUGUST 25TH

STAGE 4

203km: Estepona to Vejer de la Frontera
(second summit finish)



SUNDAY, AUGUST 30TH

STAGE 9

168.3km: Torreveja to Cumbre del Sol
(fifth summit finish)



WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2ND

STAGE 11

138km: Andorra to Cortals d'Encamp
(sixth summit finish)



SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6TH

STAGE 15

175km: Comillas to Sotres. Cabrales
(eighth summit finish)



MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7TH

STAGE 16

184km: Luarca to Ermita del Alba
(ninth and final summit finish)



WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9TH

STAGE 17

39km: Burgos (individual time trial)



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12TH

STAGE 20

181km: San Lorenzo de El Escorial to Cercedilla



Calculated **COMPETITION**

Computational innovation is taking its place in the pantheon of sports science

By Caley Fretz



MONTHS OUT: PREPARATION

Wind tunnel testing of riders in multiple positions and with multiple equipment setups, noting power loss or gain as position changes

Initial course recon; inspection of weather station data and course profile

Early calculations are made, informing which equipment options should be available on race day

PRE-RACE: DATA GATHERING

Final course recon using instrument-laden car

Precise measurement of climatic conditions and slope of every climb

Recalculate optimal equipment, position, and pacing using new data

Brief riders, directors, and mechanics

RACE DAY

Rider provides feedback on the day's sensations

Execute pacing notes provided by optimization calculation, with adjustments made for fatigue



Patxi Vila likes this car. It makes his riders faster.

The Specialized performance director is driving a mobile lab, mapping every inch of this 36.7-kilometer time trial course, the longest of the 2014 Vuelta a España.

Vila's marquee rider, Alberto Contador, sits three seconds behind Nairo Quintana, five seconds ahead of Alejandro Valverde, and, more alarming, only 25 seconds up on Chris Froome and his time trial pedigree. The stages ahead flow over the sharp Pyrenees, and every second will count.

On the dash sits an inclinometer, gathering slope data from each climb and descent. Jutting out from the side window like an insect's antenna is a wind probe, detecting wind direction and speed in real time. A GPS device maps the course down to the meter. On a notepad, Vila takes careful notes.

Time trials are no longer just the race of truth. They are races of math, of recon, of algorithms and aerodynamics. For today's top riders, the time trial is a race of optimization. Pedaling is just the final step in a long march.

After all the preparation is done, all the training completed, all the nutrition dialed, the rider is a constant. He is as good as he is, as he can be. There can be no more watts squeezed out of those quads. But precisely how and where those watts are laid onto the road can make all the difference.

THE GAINS

In a time trial like the one tackled on stage 10 of the Vuelta, relatively long with a single climb and a long downhill, the difference between an optimized ride and a poorly paced one could be over a minute.

That's why Vila is in this car, 24 hours before any rider will roll up, clip in, and storm out of the Vuelta's deep red start ramp. He's one part of a team, which also includes a couple of math whizzes and wind-tunnel technicians thousands of miles away in Morgan Hill, California, tasked with eking every possible second out of the legs of Specialized-sponsored riders.

Other technology-driven teams, like Sky, Trek Factory Racing, Cannondale-Garmin, and BMC Racing, are doing similar calculations before every important stage.

"I think some of the teams are still a bit old hat," said Ryan Cooper, founder of Best Bike Split and an optimization consultant with Trek Factory Racing. "But what Sky does, and what Trek does, and what some other teams are doing, they're starting to come around to the fact that there's more science that you can put behind this, especially in time trials, or team time trials."

Top riders no longer receive the usual pacing instructions — "go harder on the uphill, save some on the way down" — but instead a detailed run sheet for the entire course. They'll have power targets for each pitch, each straight, and each descent, based off speculative power output, wind conditions, road grade, and road surface. They know their projected finish time on a given course, accurate down to seconds, well before stepping into the start house.

They know, too, which helmet to use, which front wheel to select, whether to perform a bike change at the base of the climb, or at the top of it, or not at all; they know where to put the pressure on and where to recover. Data, and math, have not entirely replaced instinct and experience, but they certainly instruct it.

THE PROCESS

Algorithms require inputs. Optimizing something like a time trial necessitates a few numbers on the rider's side — power output over an array of durations, weight, aerodynamic drag — and environmental data like wind speed and direction, the slope of climbs and descents, and accurate GPS mapping.

More data leads to more accuracy. That's why Vila drives his instrument-equipped car, developed by a former Formula 1 telemetrist. He is in charge of the environmental side of the algorithm, and the more quality data he can collect, the better. That means setting out on course when conditions are likely to match those of race day.

"If the race is super important he'll drive months beforehand, then try to drive the same time of day, a couple days beforehand, or even the morning of," said Mark Cote, an aerodynamicist at Specialized in charge of crunching the numbers Vila sends back.

Pre-driving with an instrument-laden car isn't always possible. Weather stations, historical wind data, and accurate maps are used when on-site collection is not feasible.

Of the rider inputs, power is the easiest to procure. Most pros train with power, and have a frequently updated power profile detailing their maximal outputs over various durations. There is some art to changing these profiles to reflect the fatigue that may be present in the middle of a grand tour, and that's "where knowing the riders well is very helpful," said Cote.

Power data, specifically the power profiles, are used to create pacing profiles. If a rider has a larger anaerobic engine, and is able to overshoot his aerobic threshold and recover well, the algorithms will recommend higher spikes in power for short climbs or coming out of sharp corners. For



COMPUTATIONAL CONSULTATION

The Specialized team talks with Alberto Contador at their wind tunnel facility in Morgan Hill, California.

the diesel types — big aerobic engines that may not recover well from an anaerobic effort — steadier pacing is suggested.

“We’ll plot out instantaneous speed at each part of the course and also how much time is spent on each part of the course,” said Cote. “It all depends on how severe the climb is, and on the rider. That’s why we try to get as many power durations as possible, so you have power profile for all durations.”

Gathering aerodynamic drag figures, the other important rider-data input, requires wind-tunnel testing, velodrome testing, or a combination of the two. Specialized has its own wind tunnel, and has tested most of its top riders at least once. “The GC guys are particularly important, and the time trialists,” said Cote. “But we’ve had [Mark] Cavendish come through, and [Niki] Terpstra, [Tom] Boonen, and [Michal] Kwiatkowski.”

Other teams hire out wind tunnels to gain data on their marquee riders. Velodrome testing, performed indoors, is a common and highly accurate method of ascertaining total drag, and has the advantage of having riders put out race-day power during testing.

With power data, drag data, and environmental data gathered, it’s the algorithm’s turn in the spotlight. Given the data set, it can provide equipment recommendations and detailed pacing instructions tailored to each rider based on the demands of a particular course.

Optimization is not limited to time trials. Tom Boonen’s swap from wide 46cm handlebars to narrow 40cm bars was the direct result of velodrome testing prior to the 2013 season that showed significant aerodynamic improvements at 30 miles per hour — the sort of speeds he will hit in the final of Paris-Roubaix. Boonen’s move to Zipp 303 wheels for the classics in 2012 was informed by wind-tunnel data.

Even breakaways are analyzed. “Given the people in the break, does it make sense to attack? What is the probability that they can hold off the peloton? These are the questions we are trying to answer now,” said Cooper. “These are the questions we can answer, with the right data.”

OPTIMIZE YOURSELF

Ryan Cooper, the founder of Best Bike Split, has built a suite of optimization tools available to any amateur, ranging from simple cheat sheets based on common course profiles to detailed, custom pacing profiles.

“On the amateur level, extremely large gains are possible,” Cooper said. “That’s because they don’t tend to pace themselves very well, or don’t know how to pace themselves in certain conditions very well. In terms of what gains you’re looking at given optimal pacing, in a shorter time trial it’s in the 10- to 20-seconds range.”

Best Bike Split will produce a file that can be loaded into a Garmin Edge device that runs as a course, providing power prompts as various parts of the course are reached.

“It’s pretty simple. If you’re feeling good then you’re going to target this [power], and when you hit this point you’re going to go 20 [watts harder], and when you get to this next point you’re going to go down 40 watts,” Cooper said.

Currently in the works is a feature that will allow post-race analysis, allowing riders to compare their actual ride with the optimized ride and see how much time they could have gained.

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MORTAL IN A PRO TIME TRIAL

Specialized's Mark Cote ran a simulation with my power numbers, position, weight, and size over the Vuelta a España's first time trial, a 36.7 kilometer affair that sent riders uphill for 11 kilometers before rolling in for the final 25.

If I had raced that time trial, I would have finished in 162nd out of 194 riders, wedged between Orica's Sam Bewley and Movistar's Jonathan Castroviejo, with a time of 52 minutes and 58 seconds, according to Cote's calculations. Back with the domestiques saving energy and simply trying to make the time cut, in other words.

First, my figures. I weigh 140 pounds, or 63.5kg, and would ride a 7kg bike with about 2kg worth of clothing, helmet, and shoes. I'm built very similarly to Vincenzo Nibali, so Cote used his drag figures, measured at Specialized's wind tunnel last year. We assumed I would have ridden for Omega Pharma-Quick Step (I await Patrick Lefevere's call), and would therefore ride the same S-Works Shiv time trial frame as Nibali but with SRAM components and Zipp wheels.

I gave Cote power figures nabbed from a ride a few weeks earlier — 329 watts for 20 minutes, 319 watts for 30 minutes, 315 watts for 40 minutes, 305 watts for an hour. That's about 4.8 watts per kilogram, about right for my "retired" racer legs these days.

More interesting than my time and placement, though, were the vast time differences between different equipment setups and pacing styles.

Once he found the optimal equipment setup (which was no surprise, really), Cote added pacing optimization, and dropped my time down a further 31 seconds. That is, the difference between steady pacing, targeting 310 watts over the whole course, and optimized pacing, targeting 330 watts for the first 11km of climbing and 298 watts over the final 15km, was 31 seconds in favor of the optimized pacing.

Cote's final recommendation was to use the Shiv TT bike, S-Works TT helmet, Zipp 808 front wheel, Zipp Super9 rear wheel, no bike swap (which would cost 27 seconds), with a pacing target of 10 to 20 more watts on the uphill and 10 to 12 watts less on the downhill.

Compared to a non-optimized ride, these recommendations saved me 49 seconds. A pro contract, sadly, would require quite a bit more than that.

GETTING IT WRONG

The most infamous case of a poorly optimized time trial came in 1989. Laurent Fignon ceded the Tour de France's yellow jersey to Greg LeMond over the course of 25 kilometers. Fignon's flying ponytail contrasted against LeMond's Giro aero helmet; the Frenchman's bullhorn handlebars set him up like a sail compared to the American's long, narrow, aero bars.

According to wind-tunnel testing performed shortly after that race by *Bicycling Magazine*, the helmet alone likely cost Fignon the Tour victory.

The '89 Tour is an extreme case. It came early in the sport's understanding of aerodynamics. Today, the gains, and losses, are much smaller.

But even experienced pros can get it wrong, particularly on tricky courses, like the Vail time trial featured in the USA Pro Challenge. That course is flat early on, often with a tailwind, before it hits the long climb up Vail Pass. There is more time to be gained, and lost, on the climb, but pacing on the flats, with fresh legs, can be difficult.

"In the Pro Challenge, we followed Matthew Busche. He did the opposite of what the strategy was," said Cooper. "In that case, there was a huge tailwind on the flat early and he went faster on the first half than the model had him by about five seconds, but that's because he pushed 30 watts higher. And then on the second half his power stayed steady and then dwindled off. As you're climbing that hill you start to lose all that time, time starts to come back really quickly. So that six seconds you gained up front turned into losing a minute on the back of the course."

ALL THE ANSWERS

Cycling is still a sport of athletes, not algorithms. It always will be. There is no math that can turn a donkey into a racehorse, no way to fool the clock or the competition. And in a sport as complicated and tactical as bike racing, a perfect prediction inside a computer is impossible.

But the search for perfection is endless. In recent decades, there has been an acceleration of technological advancement and invention in sport, and the arc of mechanical innovation has begun to slide toward a plateau, frequently running up against the technical rules put in place by cycling's governing body, the UCI. The massive gains made by LeMond in 1989 have been replaced by the marginal gains made by Contador and Froome.

Optimization and computerized marginal gains are the next frontier.

Are the minds behind the latest mathematical innovations simply 21st century versions of Tulio Campagnolo and his quick releases, or Paul de Vivie and his two-speed derailleur? Not quite. Their impact is subtler. But innovation's march has undeniably expanded beyond the material world and entered one that is computational.

There is a vital similarity between the old and the new ways, of course: Cycling can be made faster and more efficient, but no technology has ever made racing any easier.

Cycling is embracing science, but romance and panache need not be given the cold shoulder. The math may inform performance, but it cannot replace it.

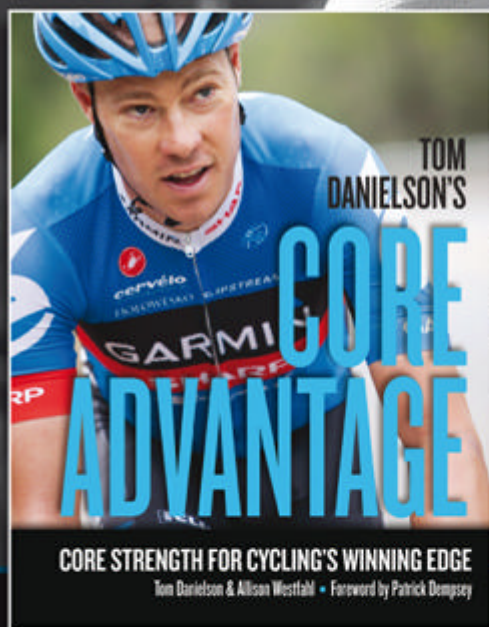
Pedaling is still the hardest part.

CORE STRENGTH

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TRAINING...TO WORK

How to use a bike commute as part of your training plan *by Trevor Connor*

Early on, I thought I had found the secret. My friend, who decimated us every week at the races, revealed to me his training weapon. Each day he commuted 20 to 30 minutes from his house, which sat on top of the toughest climb in the area. So I ditched the car and started riding everywhere. Unfortunately, what I hadn't considered was the years of base miles he had in his legs, the long rides he did on the weekends, and the fact that he barely pedaled during his ride to work. My poorly planned commute was a big reason why by April he was still decimating us and I was simply decimated.

There's more than one reason why many of us buy a pannier and turn the bike into more than a

training tool. Some of us commute because time is limited and it's a great way to get a few extra hours. Others have no choice.

For former U.S. national road champion and pro rider Mara Abbott, it's a bit of both.

Cycling is her job, but since she doesn't own a car, it's also how she does her grocery shopping and gets around town. She admits that sometimes her coach gives her a hard time, but he works it into her plan.

"It's not a question of whether bike commuting is good for training or bad for training," Abbott said. "It's more a question of integrating it into your training."

Commuting by bike can be your secret weapon for a dominant season — or it can be a season-killer. It's just a matter of knowing how to make it a beneficial part of your training and, more importantly, to know the pitfalls.

Dean Golich, a premier coach at Carmichael Training Systems who has worked with many top pros, including Abbott, said there are two issues with using a commute for training.

The first, and most important, is recovery.

"There's no problem doing intensity, there's no problem doing threshold work and splitting it up throughout the day," Golich said. "It's trying to get the recovery on the easy days so you get an adaptation from the work you're doing."

The second issue is endurance work. Abbott feels that even a 20-minute commute helps the weekly volume, but if you're looking for an endurance ride, a commute doesn't really count. The fact is, two 90-minute rides in a day are not equivalent to one three-hour ride.

There are physiological adaptations that only occur during longer sustained training. One is a slow depletion of your muscle glycogen reserves over time, which causes you to "recruit fiber that isn't normally recruited because of fatigue or fuel source," Golich said. For any accomplished cyclist, that adaptation doesn't happen during a 90-minute ride.

Another important adaptation is an increase in our natural antioxidant levels to handle the greater oxidative stress of training. In a study at Wilfrid Laurier University, where participants trained no more than 35 minutes per day for eight weeks, their fitness and oxidative stress both increased, but their natural antioxidants didn't compensate.

Finally, it's important to remember that our aerobic energy systems are very slow to kick into gear. It can take 10 to 15 minutes before the aerobic pathway is fully activated. This means that in a 20-minute commute, you may only get five to 10 minutes of quality training.

Fortunately, Golich feels that we can still race successfully without top endurance, especially if we only race for a few hours on the weekends.

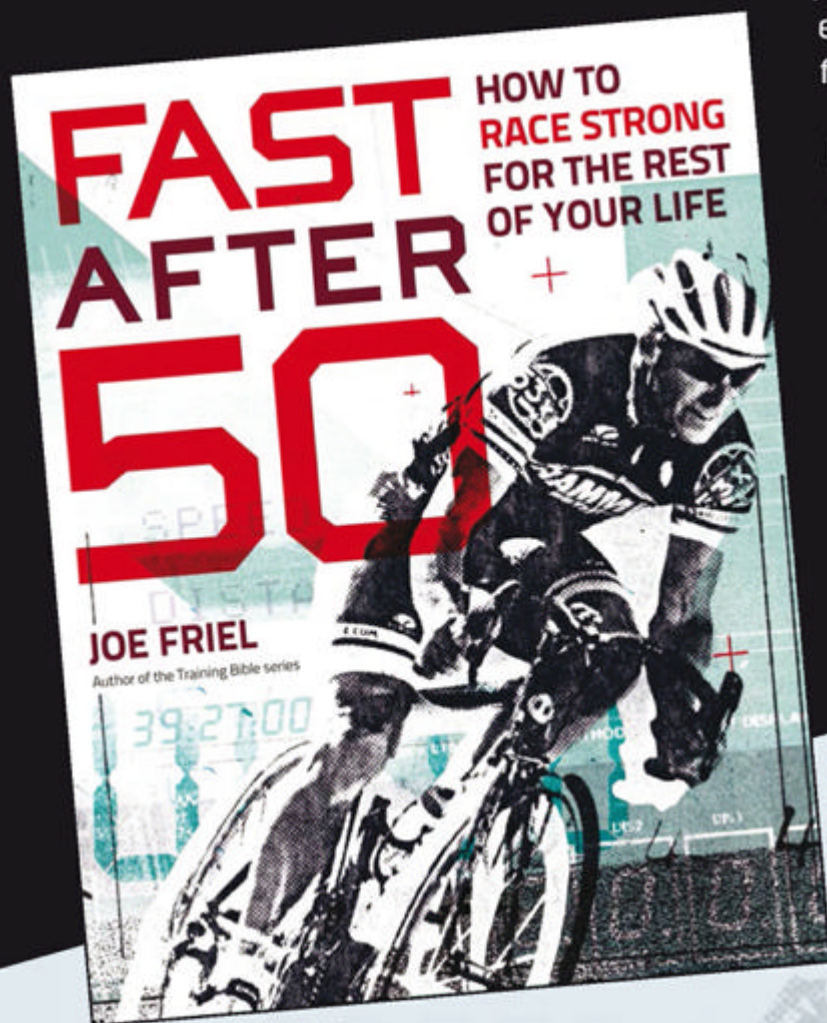
If a rider is going to get dropped in a race, Golich said, "it's because of intensity, so it's really not necessarily endurance that's the problem."

And while a commute may not be conducive to endurance training, Golich was quick to point out that it can be used very effectively when you are focusing on threshold or VO₂ work.

Abbott offered another positive spin for time-crunched athletes, since a commute kills two birds with one stone. "You're double counting it as your commute and as your bike ride," Abbott said. "Everybody loves multi-tasking!"



DON'T SETTLE FOR SLOW



Joe Friel's new book **FAST AFTER 50** is for every endurance athlete who wants to stay fast for years to come.

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COMMUTING IN THE FAST LANE

Here are some tips to maximize your commute

WORK IT INTO THE PLAN

According to Mara Abbott, treating your training plan and commute as two separate things is a mistake. “You look at your week and you say, ‘What are the workouts that I need to do?’” Then plan your commute accordingly. That 45-minute trip between work and home could be a great opportunity to throw on the shoes and bibs and get in your planned intervals.

SPLIT THE DAY UNEVENLY

There’s nothing to say that you have to do the same amount of riding at the same intensity on both ends of your day. “The strategy we’ve used in the past is to try to make the morning commute as easy as possible,” Golich said. Then, they add time to the trip home to make it two or even three hours.

MORE TIME FOR THE ENDURANCE RIDE

Getting that endurance ride is the hard part of commuting, said Golich. One way is to add time to one end of the commute, but you can also take advantage of the commute to do your shorter interval work so you can free up your weekend for the long ride.

MAKE IT A RECOVERY RIDE

“If you’ve got a recovery day,” Abbott said, “commuting is perfect.” She often runs errands by bike for her recovery rides.

RECOVERY CAN ALSO MEAN NOT COMMUTING

“To be honest,” Golich said, “sometimes you’ve just got to not do it.” The issue is still recovery, and if it’s meant to be a rest day, you may just have to hop in the carpool. If you have absolutely no choice, Abbott recommends riding as slowly as possible.

THE 15-MINUTE RULE

If your commute is short — under 15 minutes — and you can’t add time to it, then Golich recommends keeping it very easy and not counting it in your training. This is what he does with Abbott, who said she just moseys. “Sometimes, I commute slower than my mother does,” she said.

MAKE IT A LITTLE HARDER

To mimic the effects of endurance rides, you can cheat a little by riding 10 to 15 watts harder than normal. It’s going to deplete your glycogen reserves faster and “recruit muscle fibers that are predominantly for power and train them to be a little more fatigue resistant,” Golich said.


TRAIN GLYCOGEN DEPLETED — BUT BE WARNED

Another strategy to mimic endurance rides is to do the morning commute on no food, so glycogen reserves are already depleted. Golich recommends keeping the intensity up to get more bang for the buck. There is some recent research to back this strategy, but Golich still sees it as a risky technique.

DON’T SIT LIKE A HIPSTER

Abbott commutes on a ‘cross bike. “I have it setup to the exact same measurements as my road bike,” she said. You can do intervals and quality work on even the cheapest commuter, as long as it is setup like your race bike.

IT’S ALL ABOUT THE PERCENT OF TOTAL TRAINING

Abbott pointed out that if you’re regularly putting in three- or four-hour rides, a 15- to 30-minute commute really isn’t going to affect you. But if you feel that your commute is too long, “you can ride part way, then hop on a bus. Or, if you have a friend who lives nearby, you could do something like ride to work one day and get a ride home.” 

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Trust Fall

If you work in a team environment, whether athletic or otherwise, chances are good that you've participated in at least one painfully awkward team-building exercise. You know, the kind of thing where you take a day away from the office to "establish rapport" and "strengthen communication" by learning to pop balloons without your hands and feet, while pretending to tolerate Randy from sales. Don't even get me started on that prick.

Over the winter months, big-budget professional cycling teams often take time away from the bike to conduct slightly more elaborate versions of the same. Just as in your workplace, the idea is to build camaraderie among new teammates — many of whom have been rivals in years past. In early November the members of Tinkoff-Saxo climbed to the summit of Africa's storied Mount Kilimanjaro. Others have undertaken similarly perilous activities involving everything from wilderness survival and paramilitary training to swimming with dolphins. (It's possible that some team camps cultivate killer instinct more effectively than others.)

Despite these efforts to promote unity, it's still not uncommon to see intra-team rivalries emerge in cycling. There have been many over the years — think LeMond-Hinault, Riis-Ulrich, and Armstrong-Contador, to name a few. If you thought the recent infighting between Team Sky's Bradley Wiggins and Chris Froome would be the final word on sibling rivalry within the sport, then you haven't been paying much attention. Indeed, hints of tension are already emerging for 2015.

Take Astana, for example, where 2014 Tour de France winner Vincenzo Nibali may soon be challenged for leadership by his up-and-coming countryman Fabio Aru, who landed top-five finishes in both the 2014 Giro d'Italia and Vuelta a España. Or Movistar, where 2014 Giro champion Nairo Quintana and *Velo's* 2014 International Male Cyclist of the Year, Alejandro Valverde, have cheerily announced plans to "share leadership" at both the 2015 Tour and Vuelta.

The family rivalry of the year may be in the women's peloton, where the Rabo-Liv team employs both multi-time world champion Marianne Vos and her seeming heir apparent, Pauline Ferrand-Prévot, who outkicked her star teammate to take 2014's rainbow jersey in Ponferrada, Spain. I don't know about you, but I'd imagine the atmosphere at that camp might have been a little chillier this winter — something Ferrand-Prévot intimated to the French daily *L'Équipe* in early January. Somebody better get these girls to a ropes course. And quick.

As a team sport with individual results, some level of intra-team rivalry will always exist within cycling. But the sport's broken structure may also be contributing to an uptick in its incidence. It's hard to overlook the influence of the sport's big-budget, super teams as one considers both these individual rivalries and the frustrations inherent in competing team priorities.


With big dollar teams like Sky, BMC Racing, and Tinkoff-Saxo collecting the sport's marquee riders like butterflies to be pinned under glass, one can only imagine the trouble ahead. I mean, it's great that Peter Sagan got a big payday by signing with Tinkoff, but wait until the three-time Tour de France green jersey winner — now anticipated to focus primarily upon the classics in 2015 — finds himself schlepping bottles for Alberto Contador come July, just as Mark Cavendish did for Wiggins. You'll recall the fit was less than ideal, and may now threaten Sagan's career trajectory in the same way it did Cav's.

Is it possible that the absence of a salary cap in cycling is resulting in a dangerous redistribution of talent within its ranks? With almost unlim-




ited resources, the team's top squads increasingly threaten to monopolize the field by snatching up the bulk of its top riders. As this trend accelerates, fans are likely to see more and more intra-team strife. Perhaps more troubling is the prospect of less and less interesting racing, as riders who might otherwise compete head-to-head are relegated to supporting roles within a handful of the sport's wealthiest franchises.

Don't get me wrong. I love a little family competition — just ask my sisters. But when cycling's family dramas begin to overshadow the rivalries between its teams, then the time has come to make a change. Team building camps are all well and good, but maybe the problem isn't that we need better cooperation among the sport's top contenders, but rather a system where they can more reliably face off as rivals.

A salary cap would be a great place to start. On that, even Randy and I can agree. 

Dan Wuori can pop balloons using only his mind. Follow him on Twitter at @dwuori.

A full-page background image of a mountain landscape. In the foreground, a paved road curves through a valley with green and brown vegetation. A lone cyclist is visible on the road, heading away from the viewer. The middle ground shows steep, rocky mountain slopes. In the background, jagged mountain peaks rise against a bright blue sky filled with wispy white clouds. The overall tone is inspirational and adventurous.

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